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## A NEW OTHELLO.

A NOVEL.

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"LOVE IN IDLENESS," &c., &c.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE FAIREST FACE.

"And Pelleas, gazing, thought,  
'Is Guinevere herself so beautiful?'"

THE time is mid-day; the season, spring; the place, New York harbour; the scene, the deck of one of the great Atlantic liners lying in dock, about to sail on her homeward voyage—a busy scene of crowd, bustle and confusion. The whole length of the long wharf is black with people, ranks on ranks of lookers-on—loafers, idlers, interested or merely curious spectators—packed together in a solid mass, waiting to witness the departure of the ocean giant.

Ashore there is an ear-bewildering tumult and turmoil, as carts, carriages, trucks, drays and vans, which have brought passengers, passengers' friends, goods, chattels and baggage, to the landing-stage, are all entangled and jammed in apparently inextricable confusion, whilst all the drivers seem to be trying to outshout and outswear each other. On board there is not quite so much noise, although as much bustle, as a moving multitude, thick as swarming bees, surge up and down the stairs, stream along the passages, and pour in and out of the cabins. The saloon is filled, the companion-way well-nigh blocked; but on deck the crowd can circulate more freely. Every passenger has a party, large or small, of friends who have come on board to indulge in *adieux* and *au revoirs* at leisure and until the last minute.

"Not in single spies, but in battalions," do the Americans rally round their departing friends. None so poor and so obscure as not to be "seen off" by some one; none so lonely as to be left to set sail alone. Even the stranger who has "tarried but a day" in the hospitable city of New York, who has rushed through the "grand tour" of the Transatlantic world without time to form a friendship or enjoy an insight into American social life, has picked up somehow a handful of acquaintances—and here they are, faithful, to the fore, come to see the wanderer off.

On the deck, surveying the animated scene with that measured degree of interest which the travelling Briton generally permits himself to betray, are standing two men, English both, and English gentlemen too, as it does not need a second glance to tell. They are both of about the same stature, close on six feet in height; and there is a certain family resemblance in feature, not in colouring, nor in expression, between them. One is a broad-shouldered, deep-chested, fair-haired Saxon, in the early prime of life, good-looking enough to pass muster in a roll-call of handsome men—more especially if the roll were called by the mothers of daughters—mothers parentally awake to his position and prospects. He has an air of lazy good-humour, and somewhat inert strength—inert only because it does not seem to him worth while to exert it. The other is a few years younger, and of slighter, although scarcely weaker build, lithier in figure, quicker in movement, with darker hair and eyes, and more vivacity and mobility of expression, yet bearing that unmistakable family likeness to his fair-haired and stalwart companion.

They are uncle and nephew; but the equal affection and good comradeship between them is more like that of two brothers when brothers are also thorough friends. They are "not much addicted to conversation," these fellow-travellers. When they have got anything to say, they say it; but they are not given to making talk for talking's sake. So they are standing side by side, contemplating the busy scene in sociable silence; at least the uncle is looking on at the crowd in general, the nephew at one of its individual items in particular—a woman, young and tall and fair, in an unexceptionable and becoming grey dress, who has caught and fixed his roving attention—when a third Englishman, who is lounging along the deck glancing about him in the moving throng, casts his eye on the elder of our two travellers and comes to a halt.

"Why, hullo, Carresford!"

Geoffrey Carresford replies by an equally eloquent and original greeting:

"Hullo, Rockleigh!"

"Who'd have thought of seeing you here? Going across?" inquires Lord Rockleigh, with a vague jerk of his head in the direction wherein he supposes England to lie.

"Yes; we're homeward bound. Heard you were in New York, but didn't know you'd be going over on the same boat. This is Ray—don't you remember the youngster, Ray Percival?"

"By George, I do," replies Rockleigh heartily, holding out his hand. "I should scarcely have known him at first, though. Come and see Lady Rockleigh—she's just over there."

Geoffrey Carresford accompanies him readily, but young Percival steals a glance over his shoulder at the face which has attracted him as he more slowly and even reluctantly follows, regarding the probability of losing sight of "that girl in grey" in the crowd.

"Here she is," says Lord Rockleigh. "Maud, I've brought my old schoolfellow, Mr. Carresford—and Mr. Percival," he adds, glancing round in search of his other companion, "to introduce to you."

Then as Lady Rockleigh bows graciously and extends a daintily-gloved hand, her husband includes a young lady who stands by her side in the introduction, saying:

"My niece—Lady May Rivers."

Lord Rockleigh is by no means as favourable a specimen of English manhood as either of these two compatriots of his whom he has just presented to the ladies of his party. He is, to say the truth, an ugly little man; but he has a wife who, with all the adjuncts of dress and those mysteries of the toilette into which the masculine mind does not as a rule inquire too closely, may fairly pass as a beauty. She possesses still—thanks to either art or nature, or a happy combination of both—as blooming a complexion and as luxuriant golden hair as in her youth, which has certainly passed by, though it would be indiscreet to inquire how long ago it took its leave.

Lady May Rivers is young and fair—one of the fortunate many who charm without perfection of feature; nay, more than that, who charm in despite of several little imperfections; but the critic would be stern indeed who could sit as a Daniel in judgment upon that face, or could retain his critical faculties at all when looking into those eyes—large eyes of soft and limpid brown, shaded by long curling lashes. The brown hair, touched with gold, just matches them in hue. There is a delicious dimple like a baby's in the rounded cheek, a sweet half-wistful expression about the full rose lips, which being always half parted, give her a child-like and guileless look. Her aspect altogether is one of alluring and appealing softness—than which nothing can be further removed from mawkishness or insipidity—brightened by little sparkles of half-demure, half-mischievous, playfulness.

A bewitching little woman is Lady May Rivers; and Mr. Carresford mentally pronounces a favourable verdict on her appearance, whilst regarding her perhaps rather approvingly than admiringly. He is very well used to pretty women, and also to finding himself appreciated by them; and he is not easily moved to

anything more enthusiastic than the temperate but sincere approbation he bestows now on Lady Rockleigh's early-widowed niece—for a widow this girl is, although she has cast off her weeds. She is in reality my lady's niece, not his lordship's, although the latter by adoption and affection regards and always speaks of her as "his" niece.

Mr. Carresford smoothes his heavy tawny moustache as he looks down into the *piquante* alluring little face, and makes some casual remark *à propos* of their "all going across."

"Yes; fellow-victims!" she smiles.

"Are you a victim, Lady May?"

"Unless the Atlantic deals tenderly with me."

"I'm sure it—it ought to," he replies; and it is the first time he has ever stumbled into anything even so remotely approaching a compliment on three minutes' acquaintance.

"The ocean is unluckily feminine; one can't expect chivalrous consideration from it," she rejoins.

The voice is as demurely and archly sweet as the upward glance of her eyes; but to promise chivalrous consideration for his own poor part would be far too great a stretch of demonstration for Geoffrey Carresford at his present stage of development; so he neglects the tempting opening afforded him, and merely observes that he "hopes they'll have a smooth passage and all get along well."

That he will "get along well" with Lady May Rivers he feels satisfactorily sure, even on this brief acquaintance.

Meanwhile, Raymond Percival (christened as John Raymond, but always and only known among his own people as "Ray") is dutifully paying his homage to Lady Rockleigh, who accepts it graciously. He has more to say than his uncle Geoffrey—this is not going very far on Ray's behalf—and says it with more apparent interest. He has a winning smile, a bright frankness of manner, and just that mingling of self-assurance and deference which seldom fails to please women, and does not fail with Lady Rockleigh now. There is not, however, much opportunity for cultivating the new acquaintance at the present moment, as a battalion of New York friends here make their appearance, laden with bouquets for the Rockleigh party; and hardly have their floral offerings been presented, when the agent of the company brings the captain to be specially introduced to these his evidently favoured passengers. They are speedily surrounded and swallowed up in a crowd of friends. Lady Rockleigh smiles on the captain, a big, bronzed, splendid old sea-dog, and speaks him fair, while Lady May, her hands full of flowers, is hemmed in by a circle of attentive cavaliers, out of which circle Mr. Carresford quickly drifts.

Lady May Rivers is lovely, certainly; but it is too much trouble to hold his own in the brisk fire of mixed badinage, senti-



ment and travellers' small-talk which is going on around her; so he falls aside, and presently looking round for his nephew, perceives that young man's brown tweed back disappearing in the distance. Mr. Percival has indeed promptly returned on the track of his unknown beauty, and when Carresford comes up with him he has taken up his post, with his back against the bulwarks and a settled air of remaining there, his eyes fixed on the wide-open door of the companion-way just opposite, on the threshold of which *she* stands, glancing up and down the deck as if in search of some one.

"Hullo, young man, what are you glowering at?" Geoffrey demands in his bluff, hearty way.

"That girl, the one in grey, Geoff," is the frank reply, given in a discreetly lowered tone. "Isn't she——" he pauses for an adjective.

"The one in grey? H'm, not bad-looking," says Mr. Carresford royally. The lady is tall, pale, slender; to his cursory and indifferent glance, hers seems but a cold and colourless style of good looks, he would not go so far as to call it beauty.

For a few moments she remains in full view of our two travellers; then a couple of middle-aged ladies and a young man make their appearance on the scene and surround her with eager greetings. These friends are evidently the objects of her search, and with them she disappears downstairs and is lost to Mr. Percival's admiring gaze.

The commotion on deck and ashore increases as the moment of departure draws near. A bell clangs out the signal that the time has come to separate the chaff from the grain. Until this minute they have been inextricably mixed. Passengers and passengers' friends have herded together in sociable confusion. Now, as the stentorian shout, "All for the shore!" rings along the vessel, a general flutter and hurry stirs the swarming crowd; there is a hubbub of last words, a profuse display of pocket-handkerchiefs, wherewith some "contrive a double debt to pay," wiping tears and waving in parting salutation.

Nobody cries over Messrs. Carresford and Percival; they are on their way back to all the women who are at present likely to weep about them, now that they have set their faces for home, to mother and sisters waiting there. Neither does any one weep over the Rockleigh party, although two or three men linger regretfully to the very last round Lady May Rivers. Ray Percival, leaning over the bulwarks, watching the departing passengers' friends pour in a steady stream across the plank, observes the two ladies and the young man with whom his unknown beauty disappeared from his view pass ashore without her. So she is going across! they will be fellow-voyagers! As he is thinking this, and following these her friends or relatives with his eyes, they turn and wave hands in his direction. He looks round quickly, and a little way behind

him stands the object of his admiration, the tall pale girl in grey. She is glancing along the serried ranks of passengers in front of her who line the shoreward bulwarks, wedged elbow to elbow, leaning over and gazing "with all their eyes;" she is evidently in search of a place for herself.

Mr. Percival pounces on this opportunity as a cat upon a mouse.

"Will you take this place?" he says courteously, falling back to make way for her. She gives him a smile of gracious acknowledgment, a brief word of thanks, as she avails herself of his offer, and he manages to hold his position close to her.

She immediately takes out her handkerchief, and he observes, with an unreasonable degree of interest, that its purpose is not to wipe away a tear, but to wave to her friends, and that she seems quite unaffected by the parting. She is smiling as she waves her farewell to the trio on shore. Evidently, whatever relationship they may bear to her, she is not broken-hearted at leaving them.

Standing at her very elbow now as he does, he can enjoy, without any appearance of ill-breeding or staring, a thoroughly good view of the face that has charmed him at first sight. It is not a face to fascinate any and every man. Not without reason has Geoffrey Carresford mentally pronounced her, on *his* first glance, "cold and colourless." The thick coils of hair rolled up under her hat are of a dead-leaf brown, without any brightening warmth of russet or glow of gold. Her lips are of the paler coral hue, not the more vivid ripe-cherry red. Her complexion, although fine and flawless, is of that smooth ivory paleness which lacks charm to those whose ideal is the transparently fair skin through which they can see the live rose-hues pulse and pale. Her hair grows low in large ripples over a broad white forehead; her grey eyes look out with a calm, steadfast, somewhat dreamy look from under level brows; her features are of the statuesque order; mobility and vivacity are not their characteristics; her general expression, serene and sweet, has withal a touch of pride and seriousness, even approaching sadness. Her face has the clearness, the smoothness, the pure curves of early youth, but that expression is the look of womanhood. It is

"A face that never can grow old,  
And never yet has been quite young!"

Yet this pale, calm, colourless face, when once men gaze upon it and feel the spell of its beauty, seems to take the colour out of the brighter, fresher faces near. When once men meet the full look of the deep, soft grey eyes, they are apt to long to fathom those dreamy depths, and sparkling blue and vivacious black seem shallow beside them.

Ray Percival is casting about in his mind for an excuse to address her, an appropriate remark wherewith to initiate an acquaintance, when another passenger, the gentleman on her other side, who clearly is not troubled with the British stiffness and

shyness which occasionally embarrass our countrymen, takes the initiative, and opens conversation by a sociable and friendly observation :

"Big crowd, eh, ma'am?"

Receiving a smile and a monosyllabic assent in response, he continues :

"Now I like to see a good send-off like this! Seems to start us well. Been across before, ma'am?"

Another affirmative.

Mr. Percival ought to be more grateful to this discursive fellow-traveller than he is, as example encourages him to join in the conversation by remarking, what everybody can see, that the gangway is withdrawn and they are "off."

The excitement of the important moment of starting is most successful in breaking down all barriers of form and ceremony; and in a few minutes he finds himself in full flow of small-talk with his unknown beauty and with the loquacious passenger, who indeed plays the leading rôle in the conversation, as he is alike willing to confide his own feelings, plans, hopes and fears, and to inquire into those of his companions. He gives them a good deal of autobiographical information about his previous voyages, their objects and results, but the lady contributes no autobiographical details at all; she is quiet and reserved, though not repellent in manner, and all the information that Ray Percival can gather about her is that she is American, but has spent some years in Europe, and that this is her third voyage.

Meanwhile, a dozen yards further along the deck, Carresford has got a place in the front rank beside Lady May.

"What have you done with all your bouquets?" he asks her. "You had a whole conservatory full of flowers."

"Some adorn the saloon, and some my cabin."

"The favoured ones?"

"Are they favoured? They will be thrown overboard to-morrow, if not to-night."

"Is that how you treat your favourites?"

"They have their day," she replies with a soft laugh.

"And are thrown over?"

"What other end is there for—bouquets?"

"People in poetry and novels treasure up withered flowers, don't they?" observes Geoffrey, who never reads either a poem or a novel.

"It depends a little on the giver," rejoins Lady May, who is pretty enough and bright enough to introduce little suggestions of sentiment with successful and airy lightness of touch. Mr. Carresford, however, does not rise to this bait, and she continues smoothly, "Dead dried-up roses all look so much alike that if one treasures them in the plural without docketing, dating and initialing them, one gets so mixed!" He meets her arch and laughing

glance, in which an alluring softness always underlies the mirth; he smiles too, and his honest blue eyes betray that he is well satisfied with the prospect of their being fellow-voyagers.

The giant vessel glides, slow and stately, past the long crowded wharves, the last of which stretches out like a huge pointing finger, pointing the way to the open ocean. To the last inch the quays are black with people, flecked with fluttering white of waving handkerchiefs. Ray Percival, carried away by the infectious excitement round him, waves his handkerchief vaguely and vigorously to no one in particular, exclaiming:

"Good-bye to America!"

"Are you glad?" his fair neighbour asks him, with a brief kindly glance from the large grey eyes.

"Why should you think I am glad?"

"Because you are going home. You are English, are you not?"

"Yes," replies Ray, who does not mean to betray by his tone that he would be very sorry to be mistaken for anything else.

Presently, when the black crowd and the white handkerchiefs have all faded into a dull grey blur, the luncheon-bell summons the hungry passengers to the saloon. Mr. Carresford and Mr. Percival find themselves honoured by places at the captain's table, where of course the Rockleigh party are seated, Lady Rockleigh at the captain's right hand, her lord opposite, and Lady May beside her. Next to Lady May sits Geoffrey, then Ray, and next to him, to his great satisfaction, his grey-eyed beauty, who favours him with a recognizing smile as she slips into her revolving chair.

The saloon is gaily decorated with flowers, the long tables brilliant with polished silver and glass; beside each plate lies a gilt-edged *menu* and a copy of that interesting study, the passenger-list. The usual canary swings and sings in his gilt cage to cheer the voyagers. Next day it is probable that for too many of them he will trill and twitter in vain; but to-day, gliding over the placid water of the bay, every one seems happy and lively. The regiment of well-trained stewards run about with military discipline; there is a cheerful clatter of knives and forks, a brisk patter and babble of conversation going on, as friends and families talk together and solitary travellers make acquaintance.

Opposite to the Rockleigh ladies sits a good-looking dark and dapper little man, the Honourable Algernon Vesey, who has attached himself to their party for the voyage; and between him and Mr. Carresford, lovely Lady May is in her element. Ray Percival makes the most of his opportunities with his fair unknown; and perhaps nowhere on dry land is the development of an acquaintance so swift and easy as at sea. So many are the questions of personal and mutual interest on ship-board, that strangers become intimate, the merest acquaintances friends, in a day. Discussing the chances of fair weather or head-winds, comparing notes as to their previous oceanic experiences, Mr. Percival and the

grey-eyed beauty become quite friendly before the day is over—though not so friendly as Geoffrey Carresford and Lady May.

Ray's unknown is of a very different type to the Lady May Rivers; there is a staid self-possession about her, an appearance of *hauteur* which is really only a natural and habitual reserve, which offers a striking contrast to the pretty little widow's easy and fluent vivacity, with its vein of innocent coquetry, natural and unconscious as a child's. Who has not seen a mere baby manifest the feminine instinct of flirtation in its naïve little airs and graces? Some women began coquetting in their nurses' arms, and will only coquette their last with the doctor who attends them in their final illness. It is impossible for Lady May to look with quite the same eyes on a woman as on a man—especially if the man be a good-looking one. Orphaned and widowed while still young, the tears that she has shed have left her lovely eyes bright as ever, and given even an added charm of softness and wistfulness to her smile. The late Rivers, although he was generally considered to be a fairly good match for the Earl of Noland's pretty, but dowerless, orphan daughter, was many years older than she; and his personal appearance was scarcely such as seemed likely to win the first love of a young and romantic girl; thus it was probable that those people were not far from the truth who said that Lady May, though she had lived happily with her husband for the one year of their union, and sincerely wept at his death and worn her widow's weeds even beyond the conventional period, had never known real love nor real grief.

It is evening now, the last of land is lost to sight; the moon is high in the heavens, and the giant vessel glides smoothly over a shining silver sea. All the passengers are on deck, except the unpoetic minority in the smoking-room, who prefer brandy-and-soda and cigars and "poker" to moonlight. Geoffrey Carresford is fortunate enough to be first in the field with Lady May, with whom he is enjoying a promenade, while Ray Percival has seized upon an opportunity and a chair next to the object of *his* admiration. They have struck a congenial vein of interest, and are deep in a discussion on the novelists and poets of the present day. It is a fortunate vein; for she warms to the subjects; their views regarding Tennyson, Longfellow, Browning and Swinburne prove to be generally in sympathy, if not in quite perfect unison; and the stream of conversation is in free and promising flow.

It is a delightful hour to Ray Percival, he has glimmerings of artistic perception of the fitness of things; and it is pre-eminently fitting that on so lovely a night, at the outset of their voyage, he should be in congenial conversation with so beautiful a woman. The moon climbs higher "up the purple walls of heaven," a broad track of silvery light seems to lead them on their way, and point like a promise to the far, far-off land that lies before them. How pure and clear her features look in the pearly moonlight! how

deep and dreamy her eyes ! and as she turns and raises her head, how exquisite is that

“ Pure wide curve from ear to chin ! ”

Ray's admiration is at this stage so purely artistic, so simple an appreciation of what in his eyes seems perfect beauty, that he does not chafe in the least at the utter impersonality of their conversation. As far as words go, he might be discussing Longfellow and Browning with his grandmother—though he probably would not have looked in that venerable lady's face with quite the same eyes. This couple, contentedly absorbed in their literary discussion, attract the attention of another equally contented couple passing by.

“ Who is that lady Mr. Percival is talking to ? ” asks Lady May.

“ I don't know,” Mr. Carresford replies ; “ and I don't think *he* knows either. She sat next him at table ; she's a Yankee, though she hasn't much accent.”

“ She is very handsome, don't you think ? ” says Lady May.

“ H'm, I don't care much for those giraffe women—all long necks and big eyes and hollow cheeks ! ”

This description was in amusing contrast to the opinion which his nephew was at that moment mentally pronouncing :

“ She is just like one of Rossetti's beauties ! Never saw anything quite like her, out of a picture ! ”

Mr. Carresford's disparaging allusion to “ giraffe necks and hollow cheeks ”—an indirect compliment to Lady May, with her soft round curves and dimples and almost babyish bloom—is not lost upon her. She smiles, coyly pleased. She likes those big, fair, strong men, with a kind of Newfoundland-dog gentleness to women and children—likes, in a word, the Geoffrey Carresford type. And, for his part, he finds her—in his own way of putting it—“ very jolly little thing—sort of woman a man can get on with—takes her share of talk, and doesn't leave all the trouble to him ! And,” he adds to those unspoken conclusions, looking down at the dainty, piquante, moonlit profile, “ pretty too—pretty as a picture ! ” So,

“ All goes merry as a marriage bell ! ”

The two Englishmen lounge on the deck in the moonlight, each with the lady of his choice—for the hour ; and none of them dream of the poison-flower, the fatal fruit, of which this day has sown the seed. Insignificant as a little mustard seed, indeed, seem the trivial incidents of the beginning of this voyage—not quite so trivial to Ray Percival as to the rest ; although even he thinks no more of it than that he has seen this day the fairest woman's face his eyes have ever rested on.

## CHAPTER II.

## FELLOW-TRAVELLERS.

"As for Love, God wot, I love not yet!"

THERE is, comparatively speaking, much less of general sociability and familiarity on board the largest passenger steamers—the celebrated Giants and Greyhounds of the ocean—than on the smaller, yet perhaps not less comfortable, vessels. A certain sense of comradeship, as a matter of course, there must always be on any ocean voyage, amongst the company who find themselves alike cut off from the world, all links of connection severed between them and the land they have left behind and "the land they're going to!"

Ringed round by the unbroken circle of sea and sky, with no point to break the shoreless sweep of the horizon line—with nothing but the record of the log to mark the flight of time or distinguish one day from another—with no letters, no telegrams, no daily paper, there is naturally a feeling of fraternity amongst the passengers thus thrown entirely upon each other for entertainment and interest; but fifty fraternize more than four hundred. When the number runs so high, the members of this large company feel less cut off from the world—carry more of their world and its ways with them. Many hesitate to speak without an introduction; the forms and ceremonies of society are to some extent observed; there is less feeling of *esprit de corps*, and more of segregation. Thus on board the giant steamer "City of Naples," the long list of saloon passengers—so long that half of them could not know the other half, and were scarcely acquainted with them even by sight—bore amongst them much of the essential spirit of that outside world they had temporarily left behind. They asked the ever-burning questions, Who is *she*? and what is *he*? They fell into cliques; and the more exclusive of the cliques regarded the others with thinly-veiled distrust and suspicion.

The Rockleigh party must be excepted; they were not in the least inquisitive nor censorious; they looked upon their fellow-travellers with kindly equanimity, which they could afford to do, standing as they did above suspicion; and if they stood together in a little isolated group apart from the rest, this aloofness was less the result of any intention on their part than the mere working of a natural law. They were perfectly contented within the limits of their own little *coterie*, and although they showed no desire to keep the rest of the company *outside* of this charmed circle, neither did they make any overtures to invite them into it.

They were freely alluded to as "the swells" amongst those of their fellow-travellers and compatriots who regarded them from a respectful distance.



"'Arry" was on board—more than one of him—on his return from a "little business trip." 'Arry was travelling first-class of course; got up regardless of expense, in a fearful and wonderful tourist suit, and giving himself lordly airs with the stewards, who being aware that his regardlessness of expense would extend to their "tips," executed all his errands with alacrity.

His *h's* were not all in the right place, though his heart may have been; he looked at the Rockleighs with concealed respect and interest, and talked *of* them with a magnificent air of ease and familiarity.

Said one of his type to another, who had been seen in conversation with Lord Rockleigh—having given his lordship a light for his cigar and wished him good-morning:

"'Ullo, old man! got up among the swells? Well, I henvy you one of 'em, I do! Lady May, she's a stunner, she is!"

Geoffrey Carresford had expressed very much the same sentiment in terms not very much more elegant; but had he heard this irreverent appreciation of Lady May Rivers' charms, he would probably have desired to promptly punch the appreciator's head. When Mr. Carresford was not in the smoking room, where he spent a good deal of his time in Lord Rockleigh's company, he was generally to be found attached to Lady May's train. So was the Hon. Algy Vesey; so was the veteran, but still splendid-looking, bearded General Peyton; so was the captain, whenever he was relieved for a brief time from his onerous post of duty, and free to be sociable with his passengers. Lady May could monopolize the attention of half-a-dozen men at once, and still have room for more. When the huge vessel rocked on the heavy Atlantic swell, and her place was vacant at the dinner-table, and she reposed on deck in a reclining chair, luxuriously wrapped in furs, very pale and wan, she yet contrived to look even more winning than ever, as her big brown eyes glanced up pathetically from that small pale face, and the Cupid's-bow lips dropped soft words of grateful acknowledgment, as men vied with each other in bringing her grapes and ice, arranging her rugs and running on her errands. Lady Rockleigh also came in for a goodly share of attention. If not the rose, she was near the rose; and moreover was a bright and blooming flower herself, albeit a good deal fuller blown than her fair niece.

Ray Percival paid no more than ordinary courtesies of attention to either aunt or niece. He was devoted to his "Rossetti beauty," who for the first two or three days remained unknown to him, at least in regard to her name, position, status, history—unknown, indeed, in regard to anything beyond her "cold and clear-cut face;" and to his imagination there was something fascinating about this very ignorance of all concerning her. It struck the vein of romance in him which no woman had succeeded in striking before, though several had aroused in him a boyish admiration and

allured a lively and roving fancy which, on each of these successive occasions, he had been rather proud of supposing to be Love. But *this* was quite another thing. It was pure and simple artistic admiration—perfectly calm and impersonal—for an uncommon style of loveliness. So at least he assured himself confidently.

The American beauty accepted his attentions graciously, as far as they went, which was no further than a watchful care for her comforts—a “strong arm and a willing hand” ever at her service when the “rolling wave” rendered such support desirable, if not necessary—and conversation on such impersonal subjects as art and literature, with a smattering of school-room science and drawing-room politics.

She walked and talked with him as freely as Lady May did with Geoffrey Carresford and her other admirers; but these two fair women wore their roses with a difference. The grey eyes which Ray Percival admired knew no lures of coquetry, no side sparkles, nor upward glances from under drooping lashes. Often they looked level into his with a full frank gaze, crystal-pure and clear and cold. She was a woman in communion with whom it was simply impossible to introduce a tone of personal sentiment or flirtation; at least it was impossible to Ray Percival; he would as soon have coupled the idea of flirtation with the statue of a saint. Indeed, it occurred to him that if an artist were in search of a model for a picture of the Virgin Saint Dorothea, here was one. She had a soft blue hood which she wore when the wind was too rough to admit of a hat being kept in its place. Looking at her face, like a white cameo framed in this blue setting, the brown hair a little ruffled on her brow, the deep grey eyes gazing out to sea, with their wide, dreamy look, the little smile just parting her lips, a smile so gentle and sweet, and yet so calm, even to coldness, she seemed to him in feature and expression his ideal of Dorothy the Saint; and in an unguarded moment he admitted as much to his uncle during a cabin *tête-à-tête*. I regret to say that Geoffrey Carresford received the suggestion of the resemblance with unsympathetic and unseemly mirth.

“I say, Ray! I believe it’s a dead-gone case with you. Haven’t seen you so hard hit since little Polly Meekes!”

Ray frowned and flushed angrily at this profane comparison. Polly Meekes and Saint Dorothea!

“Nonsense, Geoff! don’t talk such stuff.” Then, seeing the absurdity of getting angry, he added, with an attempt at turning it off lightly, “If it was a ‘case’ as you call it, every time one saw a good-looking woman, one would be ‘hit’ very often!”

“Well, some fellows *are*,” replied Geoffrey with his sturdy good-humour, which was not very easily ruffled, especially by Ray, who was still and always the privileged “youngster” to him. “Have you found out whether your charmer is maid, wife, or widow?” he continued, comfortably ignoring his nephew’s transient annoyance.

"No," said Ray, recovering his equilibrium, and with it his usual tone of confidence and comradeship. "I haven't even heard her name. Can't pick her out of a passenger-list of four hundred, and about fifty of them unprotected females!"

"They ought to be labelled—ticketed with name and number, age and condition," observed Geoffrey, laughing at his own very mild joke. "But I'm afraid there's no chance for any fellow with your Dorothea beauty, old boy. I think I heard the captain call her 'Mrs.' somebody this morning. Haven't you noticed whether she's got a wedding-ring on?"

"No. She wears a lot of rings, and one can't *stare*," replied Ray, with an involuntary touch of the aggrieved in his accent.

"Well, I think she's a '*Mrs.*,'" rejoined Geoffrey. "Still, she might be a young widow; they marry very early over there," with a jerk of his head in the direction of America.

"She might; but it's a matter of perfect indifference to me whether she is or not," said Ray with ostentatious and over-done equanimity.

Geoffrey pursed up his lips in whistling form, but discreetly made no audible comment. After this, to whatever ideals, heroines of history or fiction, Ray discovered resemblances in his "Fair one with the grey eyes," he confided such discoveries to Geoffrey no more; nor did he entertain him by quotations of such passages from the modern poets as seemed to him accurate descriptions of her—and they were many.

They had been out three days when Carresford's irreverent allusion to his classically pure and impersonal artistic appreciation as a "case" had justly aggrieved his nephew's feelings. The next morning, coming on deck, Ray found with displeasure that she was already taking her walk, leaning on the arm of another—of the American to whom he should have been grateful as having been the first means of bringing him into conversation with her at the inception of their acquaintance, but to whom he was not grateful at all. There she was, her hand on that man's arm, walking with him, talking as pleasantly, and looking as content as she did with Ray himself. Had any idiot been blundering out some *mal-à-propos* chaff? he wondered suspiciously, for during these three days she, so far less sociable than the Lady May, had not to his knowledge taken her promenades on deck leaning on any arm but *his*.

He bowed as they passed, looked after them somewhat sulkily, and turned into the smoking-room, where the daily game of "pool" and betting on the "run" was just then in full swing. Ray Percival entered into it with zest. Lord Rockleigh had drawn the number which was generally regarded as likeliest to be the winning one, and there was a lively bidding going on around him for it. Percival recklessly outbid the rest, with the result that the number was transferred from Lord Rockleigh's pocket to his.

It was a bright, breezy morning; the blue sky was dappled with snowy clouds, the blue sea with crests of snowy foam; the great ship rose and fell grandly as she ploughed her way over the long stately swell of the waves; but the magnificent rhythm and swing of that vast slow rise and fall was a little too superb for some of the passengers; and there were fewer on deck than usual at that hour. Looking out from the smoking-room door at the promenading couples who were bravely pacing to and fro, with more or less successful attempts at steadiness, Percival perceived that the pair in whom he was interested had ceased their walk; the gentleman put his fair charge into a chair, took a rug, and tucked it round her feet. Mr. Percival flung away his half-smoked cigar and made his way towards them.

"Good-morning, sir," the American addressed him affably. "There's a good deal of motion to-day. Mrs. Fitzallan is not feeling very good."

Ray had been just long enough in America to understand that the speaker did not intend any reflection on the lady's virtue or amiability.

"I am very sorry," he said, looking down at Mrs. Fitzallan with a little more than necessary solicitude.

"The pitching made my head ache," she said with a wan little smile.

"The fresh air is the best thing for headache," observed the American, giving the rug an extra tuck round her feet, with the natural assiduity of his countrymen when their attention is turned to the care and comfort of woman—more especially when woman is fair to see.

"Yes, that was why I came on deck," she said; "the saloon felt so close and stifling."

Ray, perceiving there was a vacant space beside her chair, promptly fetched a camp-stool and installed himself there.

"It is a trying day," he observed sympathetically; "it is well to keep on deck."

The American regarded him with that frank and friendly curiosity which was merely the natural expression of his chronic interest in his fellow-creatures.

"Are you sick, sir, to-day?"

"Not the least," replied Ray, unreasonably nettled at the imputation. "I am never ill at sea."

"You are fortunate, sir," the other rejoined. "Now I will leave this lady in your charge," he presently added.

"Thank you, Mr. Hitchener," she said looking up kindly.

"For leaving you?" Mr. Hitchener rejoined, smiling with broad delight at his own little joke, which he thought neat, appropriate and in excellent taste.

"No; for your kind care."

Ray scowled slightly. He would have been better pleased if she

had repelled her compatriot's attentions, instead of thanking him for them so sweetly.

"I *am* fortunate now," he observed as Mr. Hitchener turned away. "I did not think I was when I first came on deck and found I was too late and had lost the pleasure of taking you for your morning walk."

It was the first time he had ventured on so personal and complimentary a remark. She took no notice of its flattering tendency, as she replied easily:

"Perhaps it was I that was early, not you that were late. Anyhow, I had my walk, as long a walk as I cared for this morning."

"Is your headache very bad?"

"No, it is much better now, thank you; the air has done it good."

"Nothing like open air," he rejoined.

"Mr. Hitchener is such an advocate for it," she remarked; "he thinks we ought to be allowed to keep the port-holes open at night. I guess we should have a good deal of salt water in as well as fresh air."

"That we should," he agreed. "Our first night out, the steward had not screwed up our port-hole tight enough, and the next morning our clothes were swimming. We should have salt baths gratis if Mr. Hitchener's idea were carried out. His name is Hitchener, I think you said?"

"Yes," she assented. She had a way of dropping simple monosyllables with a certain soft clearness which Ray thought very charming and characteristic.

"Do you know," he added, "I did not know *your* name until he mentioned it just now?"

"Did you not? And are you a sadder and a wiser man than you were yesterday?" she replied with a touch of quiet humour in her smile.

"Wiser, certainly—is a man not wiser for every small item of knowledge?"

"However unimportant?" she suggested.

"And sadder?" he continued. "Well, I don't know!"

"Nor I, why you should be," she remarked. "A name is a convenient handle to a personality, and I consider you should be glad to know the name of any one you happen to be talking with."

"Certainly. I suppose I shall be happier still when I've learnt off the whole passenger-list by heart."

"You will get through a good deal of conversation if you contemplate talking to the whole four hundred."

"I don't!" he said. "I hate talking to strangers."

"Do you?" and her large eyes turned to his with a glance of mildly surprised questioning.

"Yes," he replied, unsuspectingly leaving a blot open.

"Then why *do* you talk to strangers?" she rejoined, hitting the blot.

He looked a little taken aback as he stammered out:

"I—I like talking to some people whether they're strangers or not." Then he impatiently shook off his embarrassment, trampled it down, looked her straight in the face, and added boldly, "I liked talking to you even when you were a stranger. And I shall always like talking to you when we are friends, as I hope we shall be."

Mrs. Fitzallan smiled. If the young Englishman *would* be personal, she preferred this frank and rather audacious downright-ness to commonplace compliment. It did not embarrass nor annoy her.

"Friendship is a plant of slow growth," she observed pleasantly and easily. "Probably our acquaintance will have no time to grow into a friendship."

"I think it will. I intend it shall."

"Do you?" she questioned again, with a placid, amused smile. Her perfect coolness and unconsciousness charmed and yet piqued him. He felt that no tone save that of frankness, open comradeship, would ever be anything but a failure with Mrs. Fitzallan. He wished and intended to win her friendly regard, and saw that his only chance of it was in a free and candid manner with her.

"Are you going to London?" he inquired, instinct guiding him truly to the expression of just the right degree of frank and easy interest.

"Yes; I am going to join my husband there," she answered as frankly. A step was certainly gained on the road towards friendship; for she added the first personal question she had yet put to him: "Are *you* married?"

"No, I have never yet seen the woman I'd care to call my wife," replied Ray, with unabashed disloyalty to his former fancies, yet not untruly, for indeed none of them had gone to the length of inspiring him with contemplations of matrimony.

Here Geoffrey Carresford interrupted their discourse; he came along the deck casting searching glances around him, and having acknowledged Mrs. Fitzallan's presence by a brief salutation, inquired of Ray "if he had seen Lady May's chair anywhere?"

"You know it's got her name and a bit of blue ribbon to mark it," he added with serious interest.

"I haven't noticed it," said Ray. "But chairs are treated on Communistic principles here. I dare say somebody else has got it."

Geoffrey looked up and down the deck, and surveyed a long rank of reposeful figures in reclining chairs, all packed up from top to toe in many rugs, any one of whom *might* be occupying the sacred chair with the blue ribbon. He could not unpack all, or any, of these muffled-up mummies to search for it.

"Here's a nice chair, cushion and all," suggested Ray. "Wouldn't this do for Lady May till we can find her own?"

Geoffrey thought it would; and went to fetch his fair charge from the companion-way. In a few minutes Lady May Rivers was comfortably installed beside Mrs. Fitzallan, another muffled mummy, a bundle of rugs, carefully packed up by Mr. Carresford, with a very pale pretty face at the upper end of the bundle.

"Is the log posted yet?" she presently inquired. "I do want to know the day's run—and see how much of the voyage we have got over."

Carresford went on this errand with alacrity; and Ray, remembering the number that reposed in his pocket and the price that he had paid for it, followed. He returned about half-an-hour afterwards, a good deal lighter in pocket, as his high-priced number had turned out a losing one after all, but not perceptibly heavier in heart—for Ray Percival was careless of money, as young men of his class are apt to be, those who have little just as careless as those who have much. Geoffrey Carresford, who counted pounds where his nephew could only count shillings, was free-handed and generous enough, but yet less reckless of the shillings than was Ray of the pounds.

If his ill-luck cost Ray a moment's thoughtfulness, it was entirely and for ever forgotten in his satisfaction at finding Lady May and Mrs. Fitzallan deep in sociable converse; they had sympathized in the discussion of the "ills that flesh is heir to" when "on the rolling deep," had compared their symptoms and their treatment, and had now arrived at the more cheerful subject of the novels they were respectively reading.

Lady May had pretty ways and winning smiles for women as well as for men, although when exercised on her own sex they were somehow not quite the same thing nor had quite the same effect. She was not in the least jealous of other women, being far too pretty to grudge their ample meed of appreciation to other beauties; and that evening she graciously remarked to Mr. Percival, by whose side for a wonder she found herself seated:

"Your Mrs. What's-her-name is quite nice."

"She is not my Mrs. What's-her-name," objected Ray. "You mean Mrs. Fitzallan, I suppose," he added a little stiffly; and Lady May noted him down as not half so good-humoured and "jolly" as Mr. Carresford.

"I only meant by temporary tenure," she laughed. "Tenure of a day—by right of walks on deck, and so on."

"Easy terms of possession," he rejoined, catching her lightness of tone. "I think, Lady May, you hold several such properties, on lease, don't you?"

She gave her little soft, sweet, purring laugh again.

"Trespassers will not be prosecuted—on board ship," she said. "When we land, then we give up possession to the rightful owners,



if there are any. *Here*, on the Atlantic, we don't care whether there are any lawful owners or not."

It was the first time that Ray Percival had lingered beside Lady May; and having sat apart in her sole society for about half-an-hour, he was obliged to admit that she was a lively, companionable, pleasant little woman, and very pretty too. Indeed, mortal man could not talk half-an-hour with Lady May without realizing her charm. Still, the laws of attraction belong to the unknown forces; and this soft, alluring, yet vivacious personality of May Rivers exercised little more power over Ray Percival than did Mrs. Fitzallan's colder, paler beauty over Geoffrey Carresford.

Yet as the monotonous days at sea wore on, they all four became very good friends, as friends go, on board ship; they slipped into the easy familiarity of fellow-travellers—into one of those intimacies which nineteen times out of twenty break up and dissolve like mist in the very hour of landing. But there is a twentieth time, when just such a casual acquaintance cuts a channel across a life and turns its whole current.

Lord Rockleigh, who had an eye for beauty, deigned to express a qualified admiration of Mrs. Fitzallan's appearance; and Lady Rockleigh, following her niece's lead, extended a friendly hand to her. Some of the "outsiders" who had not penetrated into the magic circle of the Rockleigh party remarked how "*that* Mrs. Fitzallan had got up among the swells!"—the men generally added that she was very handsome in her own style; the women perceived that it was Mr. Percival who had "picked her up and pushed her on the Rockleighs." "Why, you know, she's just a *nobody*!" they said.

Mrs. Fitzallan went on her serene way, perfectly unconscious of comment, criticism, or envy. She had not the faintest idea that there was anything enviable or noticeable in being "taken up" by the Rockleighs. She was too pure and thorough a Republican, and also in a way too unworldly, to realize the frame of mind of those outsiders who regarded the Rockleighs as walking on a plane apart; still less did she understand those who endeavoured to push themselves into the notice of this exalted "set."

She got on very well with Lady May, though their intimacy never struck very deep root. They skimmed the shallows of such subjects as dress and the drama, fashion and fiction—and I may add poetry to the list, but not politics, which were not at all in Lady May's line; and it was perhaps well that this important topic was omitted, as the fair American's pure and sturdy Republicanism would probably have jarred with the Rockleighs' equally staunch Conservatism.

One day, when Lady May and Mrs. Fitzallan were sitting on deck chatting, the subject of music came up; they discovered that they both sang, and forthwith resorted to the grand piano in

the music-room to try their voices, together and separately. Lady May sang first; she had a sweet and rather weak soprano voice, and carolled a little *barcarolle* very prettily. The sound speedily drew an audience; the Rockleighs came in to listen, so did the Honourable Algernon, and General Peyton, and of course Mr. Carresford, and Mr. Percival, who was always with his uncle and comrade when he was not attached to Mrs. Fitzallan's skirts. Where the two attractions were combined, there as a matter of course was Ray Percival.

It was Mrs. Fitzallan's turn to take her place at the piano. At the first notes of her voice there was a slight but expressive change in the little circle—the polite and pleased air of listening deepened to a more earnest attention. This was no common voice, this contralto clear as a bell, with its exquisite velvety softness and richness of tone. Her tones in speaking were very pleasant, certainly, but had not led her audience to expect the full thrilling sweetness of her song. A professional critic, cold and severe, might have observed that she required more training and practice; the voice, the style, the expression were there, but needed study and cultivation. Amongst her listeners now, however, none were sufficiently advanced critics to recognize any such slight imperfection. As to Ray Percival, the most musical of them all, in the sense of being the most passionately fond of music, he, poor boy, was in no case to criticize. She sang a well-known song, popular and familiar to them all—Tosti's "Good-bye!" and what took her hearers especially by surprise was the dramatic and emotional quality of her voice. From this calm and statuesque creature (the "Snow Queen," as Ray in his latest flight of fancy, in the safe secrecy of his own thoughts, had entitled her) the last thing any one of them had expected was the feeling—nay, the passion, that thrilled in her tones as she sang.

Some latent fire seemed to leap into flame; it changed for the moment the whole aspect of her personality; it was as if through the cold and translucent white of a snow-pure Parian image a red glow suddenly shone, and illuminated it from within with warm, live, roseate light. Was it merely a dramatic quality in her?—a histrionic capacity for rendering the appearance of emotion? Or was it a betraying sign of hidden fires that slept beneath the snow? It was Ray Percival who wondered thus, of course. Without potentiality of feeling could there be power of expression? Could her voice, so smooth and serene in speech, thrill with that impassioned *tremolo* in song, if no passionate, emotional forces lay latent beneath her coldness? he asked himself. By which it is evident that Ray had a lesson or two yet to learn in the world's school.

Whatever the answers to his mental questioning with regard to Mrs. Fitzallan's inner self might be, the one thing certain was that the new aspect lent her a new charm, and she was not allowed

to hide her talent beneath a bushel again. The discovery of a fine singer on board an ocean steamer is a treasure-trove; and in the programme of the usual concert which was of course to take place the last night on the Atlantic, the two most prominent names were those of Lady May Rivers and Mrs. Fitzallan.

The day of the concert dawned a fresh and breezy one; the sapphire waves were tipped with snow; the wind tossed up the spray in salt, strong showers that splashed along the bulwarks.

Mrs. Fitzallan was taking her morning walk on deck with Mr. Percival; the captain had congratulated her on having "got her sea-legs on now;" and she kept her footing bravely on the heaving deck as it rose and sank.

The pair trod their morning round briskly, and were busy discussing a knotty point in a poem of Browning's, until the flow of conversation and the walk were suddenly interrupted by a playful gust of wind which seized and tore off Mrs. Fitzallan's blue hood. Ray saw it skimming along the deck and dashed after it. With the often apparent malignity and mischief of inanimate objects, it flew before him as if endeavouring to elude his grasp; but he captured it at last, just as it was about to precipitate itself into the bosom of the ocean.

Returning triumphantly with the hood in his hand, he wished he might detain it awhile before delivering it back to the position which it certainly became so well. For charming as Mrs. Fitzallan looked in her blue hood, she looked lovelier still without it at that moment. The wind that had snatched it off had also torn away with it a few hairpins, and the rich mass of her brown hair rolled loose upon her shoulders and fluttered in the breeze. Thus loosened from its close coils and falling free in the morning sunshine, a new tone of colour revealed itself in her hair—stray gleams of warm and golden light seemed to flicker and play hide-and-seek amongst that luxuriance of what had seemed till now a mere dead-leaf brown; and those rich brown waves of hair streaming free gave a new softness and youthfulness to her whole aspect too. With the flush on her usually pale cheek, the bright smile, half laughing, half embarrassed, parting her full, firm lips, as the long tresses blew about her face, and she caught and pushed them back with one hand, holding out the other to Ray for the hood, there was for the moment a look of the freshness and radiance, the dewy bloom of girlhood about her, which added just the one needed touch to make her pale and passionless beauty perfect.

While restoring the truant headgear to its place and twisting up the rebellious tresses beneath it, she was quite unconscious of Ray Percival's admiring gaze. One of her great charms in his eyes was her absence of consciousness either of her own attractions or of the admiration they elicited. To be sure, that admiration was generally silent, and as a rule—for Ray's case was quite an exception—of the calm and critical kind. People admired Mrs. Fitz-

allan's large eyes, classic features and pure complexion, but few waxed enthusiastic about her; few paid her compliments; none ventured on flattery. Although she was not in the least like

"A violet by a mossy stone  
Half hidden from the eye,"

Ray sometimes thought, in connection with her, of Wordsworth's "Lucy,"

"Whom there were none to praise,  
And very few to love!"

Those lines might have been written to describe her! He wondered whether her name was Lucy; it was a sweet name, and seemed to him well suited to her:

"Fair as a star when only one  
Is shining in the sky!"

That night she sang a song he had not heard her sing before—Elizabeth Philp's "Story of a Year." In that simple little tale of "Love and Life and Death," she seemed to pour out a heart full of feeling. From the moment her beautiful voice rose clear as a bell in the opening words to the half-mournful, half-exultant passion of the close:

"Love makes all sweetness in our lives,  
And love is more than breath!  
They love who live in God above—  
We love who still remain!  
We breast the storm, the woe, the death—  
Then live and love again!"

she sang as if she felt every word in her own soul.

There was nothing much in the simple words, yet they haunted Ray Percival in *her* voice when he went to his berth, but not to sleep.

"Love makes all sweetness in our lives!"

Did she sing so from her heart, or only from her imagination? Was she thinking of her husband as she sang that? and what manner of man was he? For the first time that night he realized that there *was* a real, live, absent Fitzallan! and for the first time the idea began to dawn upon him in the form of a question—was it possible that he was concentrating his thoughts a little too much upon a woman who was to him a stranger—a mere travelling acquaintance—concerning whom all he knew was that she was another man's wife and was on her way to join her husband? He answered by assuring himself positively and vehemently that he was *not* thinking at all too much of Mrs. Fitzallan—that sea life was dull unless one took a little interest in one's fellow-voyagers—that a man *must* "have eyes to see" that a woman was young and beautiful, even though she *had* a husband!

## CHAPTER III.

## THE FAMILY CIRCLE.

"No fond peculiar grief  
Has ever touched or bud or leaf  
Of their unblighted spring!"

By one of those curious coincidences—which seem, however, fitting enough when they occur, as they often do, as prelude to a strange story—it chanced that on the very day when Geoffrey Carresford and Ray Percival started upon the homeward voyage which was to be memorable in both their lives, the woman who was allied to them by the closest ties of love and kindred was considering an apparently trivial question, the answer to which nevertheless was fated to exercise more influence over the destinies of these, her nearest and dearest, than she dreamt of then, or for many a day thereafter. She was Geoffrey Carresford's elder sister, Ray Percival's mother; and on the day they sailed from New York, she, three thousand miles off in her London home, propounded the question to the fair quartette whom she generally classed together as "her girls"—although their relations to her and to each other were of different degrees—how were they going to divide that night?

Who was for Mrs. Meyrick's dance? and who was going to accompany her, Mrs. Percival, to Mrs. Houghton's quieter, smaller and less festive gathering?

"To meet the Houghtons' new mesmerist man?" observed Kitty, generally considered the fairest of the flock. "Is it going to be a lecture, Momie dear? Are we to be edified and instructed?"

"You are not going to be either," exclaimed Gertrude Carresford. "Momie, if Kitty doesn't go to the Meyricks', there'll be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

"There will be that anyhow. Kitty's path is strewn with scalps," laughed Rhoda; "and she has thrown poor Dicky Dawes over, in the most barefaced way, for little Barnacles!"

"Ah, now, be quiet, girls!" pleaded Kitty, who had the sweetest, most bewitching little *soupeçon* of an Irish accent. "I'll go to either party, Momie, so long as I can wear my new pink dress."

But the other "girls" refused to "be quiet."

"Now, you little humbug, you know you're promised a dozen dances deep for to-night," said one.

"Don't you think you ought to go to the Houghtons', Kitty, and study mesmerism? Get up the subject for Barnacles' benefit—it's quite in his line!" observed the other.

"I'm going to Mrs. Meyrick's!" proclaimed Rhoda resolutely. "I'd rather have a good evening's waltzing than meet Mesmer himself, if he was alive."

"Frivolous monkey!" said Gertrude. "Now if I thought he would *do* anything interesting, I'd go with Momie; but I believe it will be all 'talkee-talkee,' and anything in the line of a drawing-room lecture I hate."

"When you girls will let me get in a word," said Mrs. Percival, "I'd propose you should draw lots."

"I'm going with you, Momie," Eileen's soft voice stole in. "I don't think I'm up to dancing to-night."

"And I suppose I had better chaperone these giddy girls," suggested Gertrude promptly.

"Do you feel worse again to-day, Eily dear?" asked Mrs. Percival affectionately.

"I don't believe she slept half-an-hour last night with the pain," Kitty answered for her sister.

"Poor child! She must go and lie down after lunch. Do you feel inclined to go out at all to-night, dearie?"

"Oh, yes, I shall enjoy it," protested Eileen. "I shall like to see this wonderful man."

"That's settled, then," said Mrs. Percival in her brisk, good-natured way. "Gertie, Rhoda and Kitty to the Meyricks', and Eileen with me to the Houghtons'."

"And much edification may she derive from it!" said Rhoda.

"Eily will take an intelligent interest in the subject, I'm sure—which is more than I can say for some of you," retorted Mrs. Percival.

"One for me," laughed Kitty.

"And one for me," exclaimed Rhoda. "We're the feather-headed ones. All our brains are in our heels. Come, Kitty,

'Will you, won't you, will you, won't you,  
Come and join the dance?'"

And the two linked arms and fell into an impromptu waltz. They were still whirling round the room, light-hearted and light-footed—and truly enough, somewhat feather-headed too, Rhoda singing a waltz-tune and just beginning to get out of breath, when the London postman's sharp rat-tat resounded through the house. Kate and Rhoda stopped their dance and song, and both made a rush to the door to meet the neat-handed maid who appeared with letters. Kitty seized one letter, Rhoda the other, and Kitty gave a little cry of triumph.

"Here, Momie, here you are! New York postmark! *I've* got it!" And she ran to Mrs. Percival, holding up the letter, which Rhoda playfully pretended to snatch at.

"News of those boys of ours," observed Gertrude, smiling affectionately. "Well, and what news?"

They all drew near to Mrs. Percival as she opened the letter, with a happy, tender look. Rhoda hung round her neck and looked over her shoulder with the privilege of a spoilt child;

Eileen, who was curled up on the hearthrug at her feet, leant upon her lap and craned her little neck with eager eyes, looking from the letter to Mrs. Percival's face.

"Well," said Gertrude, "and are they all well—all right? and when are they coming?"

"All well—and coming home. They sail—why!" with an exclamation of pleasure, "they sail this very day on the 'City of Naples!'" Our boys are on the sea *now*, on their homeward voyage!"

The girls all exclaimed gladly at this news. Mrs. Percival looked up at three bright smiling faces, then down on the little pale, upturned face at her knee. Eileen's soft dark eyes grew larger, deeper, brighter, a scarlet flush suffused her usually white thin cheek; she laid her face against "Momie's" lap with a happy smile.

"How nice!" she murmured gently. "On the sea to-day!"

Gertrude inquired specially after Geoff and Rhoda about Ray; to Kitty they were of equal—and neither of them in reality of all-absorbing—interest. Eileen made no special inquiries, but listened eagerly to every little detail Mrs. Percival read from the letter.

That evening, when this "happy family" circle were all dressing for their respective parties, the house was like a cage full of twittering birds, as the girls fluttered in and out of each other's rooms with a patter of light feet, soft frou-frou of dresses, and babble of laughter and chattering, chirruping voices. They were one and all light-hearted and lively, and though Eileen was delicate, neither she nor any one else made any fuss about it. They were all kindly, sensible people, and not given to pulling long faces—unless indeed anything were wrong with Geoff or Ray! When Eily was ill they were sorry, but cheerful over it; if she got worse they sent for the doctor; and Eileen herself, if a shade quieter, was of just as blithe and buoyant a disposition as the rest. This evening she was especially happy, since that welcome letter had borne the good news that King Geoffrey and Prince Ray were coming home, and she was smiling and singing softly to herself as she arrayed herself in one of those pretty simple white dresses, whose simplicity does not mean cheapness, as the payer of the dressmaker's little account knows.

Although pale and thin, Eileen Dundas was still an attractive girl, if not positively pretty, with her delicate features, sweet sensitive lips and soft dark eyes and hair. Her sister Kate, generally regarded as the family beauty, was very like her, but taller, fuller, with rounder curves, redder lips and rosier cheeks. Kitty was busy donning a gorgeous array of pink china silk and pearl embroidery and rose-buds, by help of which, in her secret heart, she contemplated completing, if it were not indeed already achieved, the subjugation of "Barnacles"—otherwise Dr. Barnabas Grey—her latest and favourite victim.



Rhoda Percival, who was at present in that happy stage of youth when the dance is more than the partner, and any one fairly good-looking and agreeable partner neither better nor worse than any other, was attired in pale blue; and Gertrude Carresford, who was sufficiently the senior of the other three to play at semi-maternal airs with them, and to relish being classed with them as one of "the girls," was in a canary-coloured silk.

"Turquoise, topaz, pearl, and—what can I call you, Kitty?" asked Mrs. Percival, surveying with a satisfied air of possessive family pride her fair quartette. "I can't think of any pink precious stone!"

"Kitty's a flower," said Eileen looking admiringly at her lovely sister. "Queen Rose, of the Rosebud Garden!"

"I'm glad to see our white rosebud has got a colour to-night," said Mrs. Percival, patting Eileen's cheek kindly.

"Oh, she's going to get well now, to be blooming to meet King Geoffrey ten days hence," laughed Kate.

"And Prince Ray!" Eileen added in eager protest.

"Dear old Ray," exclaimed Rhoda. "I do want Ray back. The house doesn't seem half like home without him."

Mrs. Percival smiled at her daughter. She "wanted" her boy badly too. She was good to look at when she smiled, a whole-hearted smile, as warm and genial as summer sunshine; her beautiful blue eyes were as bright as her young daughter's, and had a softer, tenderer light than that vivacious sparkle of youth.

"Now come, girls," she said. "My cab's at the door, and it's time to send for yours. Make haste, Rhoda darling, and get your gloves on."

Whilst the two detachments of the family are on their way to their respective destinations, I will give a brief sketch of the family history and the relationship connecting them all.

To go back a generation—only one, and that only for a cursory glimpse—Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Carresford, having lost several children in infancy, had three left surviving, with gaps of several years between them. These were Mary, the eldest girl; Gertrude, the youngest of all, and Geoffrey, son and heir, who came between these two. Mary, her mother's help and *confidante*, and proud of acting "little mamma" to the younger children, grew womanly beyond her years; she was only sixteen when John Percival fell in love with her. He was in every way a good fellow, as well as a good match; her parents could not refuse their consent to so satisfactory a settlement for their daughter, and could urge no reason for delay, except Mary's youth; but her lover truly argued that she was no child in character, attainments and appearance, if almost one in years. Mary Carresford was not a brilliant nor an intellectual girl; she was of the sweet, sensible, practical, domestic type—the "Angel in the House"—and as her mother used to say, she had the household faculties of a woman twice her age. So Mary was

a wife at seventeen, a mother at eighteen; thus Geoffrey found himself an uncle at little more than seven years old, and, what was more amusing still to them all, little Gertrude, the "baby," was an aunt!

It is difficult to say whether the girlish mother or the grandmother, still in her prime, was the more delighted to watch the little Gertie giving herself infantile airs of instruction and protection with the baby Ray. In the course of a few years came another happy event: Ray's sister, little Rhoda, was born; and then there were no more happy events, but only sad ones for the next decade in the Carresford family. First, John Percival was a considerable loser by the untoward end of certain speculations in which he had too sanguinely embarked. It did not mean ruin, but it meant retrenchment, economy, alteration of their whole style of living. Then Mrs. Carresford, the dear house-mother, died, beloved and mourned; then another heavy blow fell. John Percival, after a lingering illness, also passed away; and Mary Percival returned home a widow, with her two children, to keep her widowed father's house.

Raymond Carresford had adopted two orphan nieces, Kate and Eileen Dundas, his favourite sister's children, and had taken them into his home to bring up with and as his own. Thus Mary Percival had four young girls growing up in her charge, her little sister Gertrude, her own Rhoda, and her young cousins, Kate and Eileen, who came in between Gertrude and Rhoda in age. Gertie's childish name for her elder sister had been "Mamie," and between that and little Rhoda's first stammering attempts at calling "Mama," the pet name of "Momie" had arisen; and thenceforth Mrs. Percival was neither "Mary" to her young sister and cousins, nor "mama" to her daughter, but "Momie," always Momie to them all.

When Raymond Carresford died, some years after his wife, he left Kate and Eileen Dundas to the care of his daughter, Mary Percival; he left, after making a moderate provision for his two daughters, the whole residue of his handsome property to his son Geoffrey, and the reversion, should Geoffrey die without issue, to his grandson, John Raymond Percival, who was, failing Geoffrey, the only boy in the family. Ray's succession, however, seemed such a remote improbability that little or no serious consideration was generally attached to it in the family. Geoffrey, their handsome, healthy, splendid Geoff, in the early prime of vigorous manhood, was not the man to die childless. He was sure to marry, and bring up stalwart sons to succeed him. Still, should he chance to die without offspring, Ray Percival was his heir; and in that case it was Mr. Carresford's wish, expressed in his will, that his grandson should take the name of Carresford.

Although Ray himself did not bestow much thought or care on the remote contingency of his succession to the uncle, who was so

little his senior as to be rather like an elder brother to him, his position as heir-presumptive to the Carresford property was by no means ignored amongst those persons who stood towards him in the relation of creditors; and these, I regret to say, were more numerous than Mrs. Percival knew. She was aware that one of her darling boy's few—very few—little failings was a lack of proper consideration of the importance of due regulation of his accounts. But that was so like his dear father; and then he was young, and his thoughtlessness would no doubt mend with advancing years. In fact Ray inherited expensive tastes, and that sort of lavishness of disposition which is called "royal" in a rich man, and, truly enough, reckless in a poor one.

On attaining his majority, he had come into possession of a small slice of the family property, and there was thus no necessity for him to work for his daily bread. His capital was a very modest one; but he had large and sanguine ideas of doubling, quadrupling it. The multiplying process, however, somehow failed: part of his money went down in a mine, part smashed up in a railway, a part evaporated in a bubble. Still Ray Percival, although he stumbled into pecuniary scrapes, had always hitherto managed to scramble out of them; he was often in difficulties, but had never come to any serious grief, nor brought any responsibility nor annoyance upon his family. Indeed, on the whole, for a young man without the wholesome control of regular employment, a widow's only son and spoilt darling as he was, Ray had given very little trouble at home; and his mother could truthfully declare that on the score of general character and conduct he had never cost her one hour's anxiety.

As to the girls also, the whole four of them, she protested, had never been a bit of trouble to her, except on those occasions when measles and scarlet fever ran through their happy family—or when the increasing number and mixed quality of Kate's admirers caused her some apprehension lest pretty Kitty should make an imprudent match, while on the other hand Gertrude's calm and critical attitude towards mankind sometimes made her fear that Gertrude would make no match at all.

But to return to the Houghtons' evening party, at which by this time Mrs. Percival and Eileen Dundas have arrived.

The room was full when they entered, that is to say all the seats were occupied, and a fair sprinkling of people were standing about; but it was not a crush. The Houghtons disapproved of overcrowding, and deemed a crush especially unsuitable to an entertainment with a purpose, as this was, the purpose being the introduction to their select circle of the professor of mesmerism, the worker of wonderful cures, whom Mr. Houghton had lately discovered. The wonderful cures had as yet to be taken on trust, as the mesmerist was not yet eminent; he had only lately arrived in England, and his was at present a new and unknown name.

This was, however, all the better for the Houghtons should he turn out a success, as then to them, the first to take him up, would thus be due the lion's share of the credit of the discovery. Mr. Houghton had discovered ere now lions who turned out to be only braying in the lion's hide; but this time he was confident that he had got hold of the right man to make a genuine success.

Mrs. Percival, having shaken hands with her host and hostess, and greeted one or two acquaintances, looked round the room with the same question in her mind which the girl at her side presently put into words in an undertone. "Which is he, I wonder?" Her roving glance soon rested on a man who stood near the mantelpiece, the centre of a little group, who seemed to be regarding him and listening to his words with attention.

There was nothing very noticeable about his figure; it was of passable proportions, and scarcely, if at all, above the average height of men. Nor were his features in any way remarkable; they were rather large, firm, and regular enough to give him some claim—though it was not likely to be an undisputed claim—to good looks. But although both form and features belonged to ordinary types enough, there yet was something striking about this man. Few people passed him over without a second glance. His hair was of a hue seldom seen; it was either naturally of a peculiar greyish flaxen, or had turned that shade of grey all over with a wonderful evenness; it was nowhere pure white, and nowhere was there a tinge of colour in it, dark or bright. The beard and moustache were of the same *gris cendré*; they almost concealed a mouth which, so far as its character could be seen, appeared to be firm, close and resolute even to obstinacy. In curious contrast with this colourless hair were his dark eyebrows and blue eyes—strangely deep and piercing eyes of a cold steel blue. In their keen glance, indeed about the whole face, there was an expression of power, penetration, and bold and tranquil confidence, which effectually removed his in no way uncommon features from the region of the commonplace.

Mrs. Percival had guessed that this was the hero of the evening, to meet whom the guests had been chiefly bidden, before she caught what he was saying, which confirmed her in her supposition.

"It is probable that Mesmer himself very imperfectly understood the nature of the force he supposed himself to have discovered. I regard it as certain that he did not comprehend the almost incalculable possibilities which it enfolds. It is the torch that lights up the darkness of nature's mysteries—the key to the occult forces, if we only know how to turn it in the lock."

This sounded very interesting; but just then Mrs. Percival caught sight of a vacant chair—an easy, cushioned chair, which proved to be metal even more attractive. Towards this tempting seat she made her way hastily, lest the fair prospect should be

snatched from her eyes; and she installed herself luxuriously in its velvet embrace, whilst Eileen, girlishly interested, drew gradually near to the centre of attraction, towards whom the host also now advanced, having just got through the reception of a batch of guests.

"Doctor," Mr. Houghton said, after a few casual remarks, lowering his voice as if approaching some sacred mystery, "I think all our little party are assembled now, and I am sure that all would be deeply interested if you could favour us with some little—ah—exhibition"—he felt that this word was an error as soon as he had uttered it, and hastily substituted—"some—experiment?"

"An experiment requires a subject," replied the mesmerist, in the cool and deliberate tones that seemed to be the natural accompaniments of his keen, penetrating gaze. "I do not know if there is amongst this company a person sufficiently sensitive to be subject to the influence, who would be willing to assist me in any experiments."

He looked round slowly, searchingly, and his glance rested on Eileen Dundas, standing near, listening with attentive eyes. He looked at her steadily for a moment or two, and then said to the host:

"Will you introduce me to this young lady?"

"With pleasure," replied Mr. Houghton, and went through the usual formula in an unusually *empresé* manner, as he presented "Dr. Fitzallan" to "Miss Dundas."

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(To be continued.)

## EARLY ENGLISH GARDENS AND ELIZABETHAN GARDENS.

By MAY CROMMELIN,

AUTHOR OF "QUEENIE," "BROWN EYES, ETC."

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### I.—EARLY ENGLISH GARDENS.

ENGLAND is, beyond most countries, a land of gardens. Whether the Romans found gardens in the island, after gaining the white cliffs of Albion, seems unlikely. But they certainly brought the art of flower-culture with them, since when it has thriven through successive ages until our landscape gardening has become proverbial. A love of having, every man his own particular garden ground, seems inherent in the English mind; from those which are famous, belonging to stately homes, down to the tiny blooming plots, neatly hedged-in, before many a cottage door.

Even in Anglo-Saxon days there are long vocabularies of the flowers which our forefathers then cultivated. Some of these were herbs only useful to flavour the housewife's pot; others are difficult to identify; while the "rosa" and "lilie" are called by their Roman names, perhaps thereby showing that the southern conquerors brought the finer varieties of these to the rugged British land they so greatly civilized. But of the gardens themselves there is no description surviving. We can only guess from words—those pieces of a puzzle map—a dim outline of what they may have been, the finest probably somewhat resembling a small farm, or even that of a cottage garden of our days.

The Anglo-Saxon names for a garden, *wyrt-tun* (plant inclosure) and *ort-geard* (our modern orchard) tell, at least, of walled or fenced plots of garden ground. Then another name, *leac-tun* (leek inclosure), became the common term for a kitchen garden, while the gardener was the leek-ward. This seems to show that the leek was the favourite vegetable of those days, of which onions (*enne-leac*) and garlic (*gar-leac*) were considered as varieties. Bean and cress are also Anglo-Saxon words; while pea, cabbage, turnip and radish were apparently adopted with their Latin names when the conquering tribes had settled themselves in the "silver coasted isle," to them a land of Goshen.

We may in fancy take a walk on a spring evening through the

apple-tree garden (*apulder-tun*) of an Anglo-Saxon homestead, the wooden-built *ham* with its surrounding bank and fence, and guess that as apples seem to have been the favourite fruit of its worthy lord and lady, therefore many must have been the flowering branches laden with snowy blossom of the two kinds of trees that grew therein; the souring apple and the sweetening apple our forefathers only knew; and of which they brewed their cider or apple wine. Passing out of this apple inclosure, there must have elsewhere been growing plum, medlar, quince and nut trees about the homely dwelling, for the names of all these are pure Anglo-Saxon. Furthermore, they would have pear, peach and cherry trees, for these are spoken of in their chronicles, though with names apparently but slightly Anglicized from the Latin. Perhaps the gardens planted by the rich Romans round their beautiful villas, of which we yet find traces with admiring wonder, had not wholly fallen into wildernesses when the hardy fair-haired Angles and Saxons overswept the land. In these, too, they must have found the chestnut and pine, the small kernels of which latter were eaten as fruit up to the middle ages; the olive also, which they called *ale-beam* or oil-tree. Strawberries and raspberries they apparently met with growing wild as well as cultivated, and knew their fragrant flavour well, not needing to borrow or invent new names for them. And the vine they gladly recognized, or made acquaintance with, as the *win-treow* or wine-tree. Vines were indeed cultivated in the open air in England for apparently several centuries. In later days Giraldus Cambrensis, when describing his birth-place of Manorbier Castle, near Pembroke, says it had under its walls a fish pond and "a beautiful garden, inclosed on one side by a vineyard, and on the other by a wood, remarkable for the projection of its rocks and the height of its hazel trees."

Of flowers we find from the names quoted that, besides lilies and roses, violets, gilliflowers, marigolds and sunflowers bloomed in our Anglo-Saxon gardens, also honeysuckle and piony, while southernwood was doubtless ranked excellent for its smell; mint, sage and rue were among the pot herbs; and others were esteemed for their supposed medicinal virtues.

All this tends to show that gardens were cultivated in these early times, but it is not till the middle ages that romances and stories teem with allusions to gardens and the joyance taken therein. Illuminated MS. are full of queer little pictures of kings and queens playing chess in small paved-in gardens, or receiving courtiers therein; and in the "*Roman de Berte*," Charles Martel is shown as dining in his garden when the rose was in blossom. Imagine the dulness of the grim castles of feudal times with their gloomy stone chambers, so small and cramped and dark to our modern ideas! How glad their inmates must have been to escape from such dungeon walls into the freedom and freshness of the outer world. And how the troubadours and minstrels in those days—whc



whatever the knights may have felt, were apparently not always hankering after tourneys or battles, nowadays modified into the Englishman's morning desire to go out and kill something—how they delighted in the May-tide and the gay greenwood, when all the earth was full of new and lusty life.

"When shaws\* been sheene and shraddest† full fayre,  
And leaves both large and longe;  
Itt is merrye walking in the fayre forrrest,  
To heare the small birdes songe."

*"Robin Hood."*

\* Woods.

† Swards.

After a heavy noon-tide dinner, it seems to have been the custom for the elder men to remain drinking heavily or nodding to sleep; but the dames and damozels, the younger knights, squires and lively pages hastened from hall to amuse themselves in the castle, or to "daunce upon the grene."

In the early English romance of "Sir Degrevant," the ladies retire after dinner to "dight themselves afresh," then

"Dame Mildore and her may (maid)  
Went to the orchard to play."

In "Blonde of Oxford," the whole party sally forth after dinner to stray and play in the woods, or in the open, then unfenced country.

"Après manger lavent leur mains  
Puis s'en vont jouer, qui ains ains,  
Ou en forés ou en rivières."

And with them goes naughty Jehan the page, in those merry but licentious days. But as in case of outlaws, or of robber or other ungentle knights in neighbouring strongholds, this pastime of wandering far from home may have had its dangers at times, so we find that the garden snugly sheltered under the castle walls was often the favourite resort. In the "Franklin's Tale," Dorigen and her friends bring their victual and other purveyance to a garden near by, where they "play them all the longe day."

"May had painted with his softe schoures,  
This gardeyn ful of leves and of floures:  
And craft of mannes hond so curiously  
Arrayed had this gardeyn of suche pris,  
As if it were the verray paradis.

\* \* \* \*

Tho' come her other frendes many on,  
And in the alleyes romed up and down."

When spring's breath unfolded the leaves from their brown sheaths, the ladies loved to trip down daintily into their gardens holding up their trains when these were worn long. Then, perchance, they would nibble in April the green buds of hawthorn,

## 594 *Early English Gardens and Elizabethan Gardens.*

long after called "ladies' meat." The inference may be wrong, yet we read that "primerose buddes and chyknwede" were used for salad. But their chief object would be to gather green boughs and early flowers with which to strew the rushes on their floors. These "sweet strewings" had their appointed seasons, as Herrick later sang. After the rosemary and bays of Christmas-tide, and its holly and mistletoe, the greener box held sway till "dancing Easter-day," to be followed by the crisped yew.

"When yew is out, then birch comes in,  
And many flowers beside,  
Both of a fresh and fragrant kin,  
To honour Whitsuntide.

Green rushes then and sweetest bents,  
With cooler oaken boughs  
Come in for comely ornaments,  
To re-adorn the house."

*"Ceremonies for Candlemas Eve."*

And of those gathered for the fanciful marriage of Thame and Isis, Drayton makes mention of lavender, balm, mint, "sweet basil rare for smell," camomile and thyme, all of which would, of course, emit their fragrance on being crushed underfoot.

"Amongst these strewing kinds some wild that grow  
As Burnet, all abroad, and Meadow wort they throw."

*"Polyolbion."*

And though these strewings are of Elizabethan days, the armfuls of greenery brought in by dames and daughters of the barons in the reigns of the Edwards were most likely the same. In the romance of "Richard Cœur-de-Lion," what a delicious picture of the spring-time, and its gladness thrilling all nature, is given in these minstrel rhymes.

"Merye is in the tyme of May,  
Whenne foulis singe in her lay;  
Flowres on appyl-trees and perye (pear-trees),  
Smales foules singe merye,  
Ladies strowe here bowres  
With rede roses and lylle flowres."

Let us seek old Chaucer to gain passing glimpses through his eyes, as it were, of the gardens he was fain to walk in in the fresh spring-time. "Freshe" is his favourite epithet, used again and again to describe the season he loved "of Aperil."

"When clothéd is the mede  
With newe grene, of lusty Veer the prime,  
And swete smellen flowers white and rede."

*"Legende of Good Women."*

And most fresh himself, and jocund of all poets, the old man surely is. How he delights in the May—which word apparently meant more than the mere month, indeed the whole spring from lilac-

tide to summer-time—all the glad renewal of life, sap, joyaunce in this old world of men and women, of trees and flowers, of beasts and birds. He loved his books so heartily that there was "game none" that could lure him from his studies to take a holiday, save only when that in May

"I hear the fowlës singe  
And that the flowres ginnen for to springe,  
Farewel my boke and my devocioun!"

*Ibid.*

And then this old courtier-poet, the friend of John of Gaunt, this "Father of English undefiled," Dan Chaucer, as he was later called with familiar worship, would hasten to his garden with the dawn, where he would kneel down, as he tells us, in the dew upon the "small, soft, sweet grass," to gaze with ever-new admiring wonder upon—what? Only the small white petals of a daisy that had been close-lapped all night, and was now unfolding to the rising sun. With a very rapture of worship, the poet gazes and gazes again at the golden boss of the little "day's eye," as he tells us it is rightly called. Hear what he says himself:

"My busie ghost, that thursteth always new,  
To seen this flower, so young, so fresh of hew,  
Constrained me, with so greedy desire,  
That in my harte I fele yet the fire  
That made me rise ere it were day,  
And this was now the first morow of Maie,  
With dreadfull haste and glad devocioun,  
For to been at the resurrection  
Of this flower, when it should uncloze  
Again the sunne, that rose as red as rose.

\* \* \* \*

And down on knees anon right I me sette,  
And as I could this fresh flower I grette,  
Kneeling alway, till it unclosed was,  
Upon the smalle, softe, swete gras.

\* \* \* \*

The longe day I shepe me for to abide,  
For nothing else, and I shall not lie,  
But for to look upon the daisie,  
That well by reason men it call may  
The daisie, or els the eye of the day."

And then at night Chaucer—and if he, why not others of that day?—prepares to sleep out at night in his garden, which was probably a small square plot, stocked with sweet herbs.

"And in a little herber that I have,  
That benchéd was on turves fresh-i-grave,  
I bade men shoulde me my couche make,  
For deintie of the newe sommer's sake,  
I bade hem strawen flowers on my bedde.

*Prologue to the "Legend of Good Women."*

## 596 *Early English Gardens and Elizabethan Gardens.*

This garden would also have a summer bower planted round, like another arbour Chaucer describes, with sycamore and eglantine; for how lovingly he tells of once perceiving

" . . . so sweet an air  
Of the eglanters,"

that certainly he deems no heart can be in such despair but it should soon take comfort if it once inhaled this sweet savour.

Likewise, we may remember his knight, January the olde, who owned

" A gardyn walled al with stoon,  
So fair a gardyn wot I nowhere noon."

Then again, when the pilgrims have reached Canterbury, the wife of Bath, being weary, says to the prioress: "Madam, will ye stalk privily into the garden to see the herbs grow?" Whereupon forth they wend, passing softly into the herbary.

" For many a herb grew for sewe and surgery;  
And all the alleys fair and parid, and raylid, and ymakid;  
The sage and the hyssop y frethid and istakid;  
And other beddis by and by fresh ydight."

After which little stroll both dames have agreed to return to their hostess's parlour to drink wine and chat till supper-time. Thus we see that good lodgings, or hostelries, must have had good gardens that were a "sportful sight" to the guests that came thither. Such a mediæval garden seems to have been somewhat like a shrubbery, or left to nature, except for the "beds" of guarded plants that had fences several feet high to keep off dogs. The alleys, as we read above, were kept neatly ordered and railed in. The short sward that Chaucer praises was full of daisies, buttercups and dandelions that were cherished as garden flowers, and knew not daisy-rakes or lawn-cutters. Among garden flowers were also reckoned red and white hawthorn, dogroses, primroses, nightshade, snowdrops, bluebells, violets, periwinkle; and also strangely enough nettles, though the white nettle-flower is not unworthy of being gathered even nowadays. If the garden owned a spring, this would also be diverted into a rudely-carved stone fountain, filled with fish.

In the "Parliament of Birds" Chaucer has depicted such a garden.

" A gardein saw I, full of blossomed bowis  
Upon a river in a grene mede,

\* \* \* \*

With flowres, white, blue, yellow and rede,  
And cold-welle streames, nothing dede,  
That swommen full of smale fishes light,  
With finnis rede, and scales silver bright.  
On every bough the birdes heard I sing.

\* \* \* \*

The little pretty conies to their play gan hie  
And further all about I gan espie,  
The dredful roe, the buck, the hart and hind,  
Squirrels and beasts small of gentle kind."

A garden full of rabbits, of "dredful" or timid roe and fallow deer must have been in fact a woodland park, where in the deep foliage he heard music playing of such ravishing sweetness

"That God, that maker is of all and Lorde,  
No heard never better, as I guesse."

The garden seems indeed to have been a favourite resort wherein to enjoy the music and songs of minstrels and gleemen. Taking leave of Chaucer, lustiest lover of the May and sweetest singer of spring-time, we find the description of another garden in the "Romaunt of the Rose." This romance was originally written in French by Jean Clopinell, or de Meury, and its English version was long attributed to Chaucer, but is now decided to be by an unknown writer of that date, one of the many disciples of the master. This fair French garden, as set forth in the argument, was designed to protect the red rose of love which grew therein, guarded by Danger and Wicked Tongue. Nevertheless, though the tale is allegorical, the garden itself resembles so much Chaucer's English pleasaunces that we may take it for granted as a description of one of that period embellished by a few fanciful touches. This garden had a high embattled wall "instead of hedge;" the latter being plainly far more usual, except in the case of a rich lord, like the old knight January; and on its walls were depicted in gold and azure all manner of allegories (a fanciful embellishment which may be supposed imaginary, and intended to scare all thieves or false knights from seeking to scale the walls and rob the rose of love).

"The garden was by measuring  
Right even and square in compassing.

\* \* \* \*

And trees there were great foison,  
That baren nuts in hir season,  
Such as menne nutmegs call,  
That swote of savour been withall  
And almandres great plentee,  
Figs and many a date tree.

\* \* \* \*

There was eke waxing many a spice  
Of clove, gilofre, and licorice,  
Gingere and grein de Paris."

The singer's imagination has here borrowed from those Eastern spices and preserves that were brought by outland merchants and used at banquets for dessert—cloves, nutmegs and dates. In such an ideal garden, all should combine to render the home of the

rose paradisaical. But presently the minstrel returns to more familiar ground, telling how also

"Many homely trees there were,  
That peaches, coines, and apples bore;  
Medlars, plummes, peares, chasteinis,  
Cherise, of which many one fain is,

\* \* \* \*

With many high laurer and pine

\* \* \* \*

With cipres and with oliveris."

Besides the latter there were also great elms, maples, planes and lindens, with all manner of other trees. These trees were full of leaping squirrels; birds sang in every bough; little runnels of tinkling water made music to one's liking and kept the green-sward fresh as velvet. This sward was "painted with flowers," the violet "all newe," and the periwinkle. Further on,

"Downe by a litel path I fond  
Of mintes full and fennell greene."

It would take too much space to enumerate here the sweet herbs that were carefully tended in all the English gardens of that period, either for pottage or medicinal purposes. Among those used in flavouring were violets, daisies, marigolds; with red nettles, heart's-tongue and vervain for sauce. A herbary well filled was truly the pride of not only the kitchen but of the still-room in those days; for all the ladies were leeches, more or less skilled in brewing drinks and cordials made from all manner of plants to cure every ailment. And when any plant seemed mysterious of growth (like the mistletoe, that was called self-heal because of its supposed virtue), or thought to resemble a portion of the human frame, or to indicate in any way the symptoms of a malady—as spotted lungwort, mouse-ear, adder's tongue, mandrake, and many more—they were all added to the list of herbs gathered with care and incantations by the herb-pickers under the moon's light, or at sunrise. Despite so much superstition, there were doubtless some good and simple remedies distilled from what are now often called weeds.

In that delightful book, "*Homes of Other Days*," by T. Wright, F.S.A., there are little pictures taken from the illuminated MS. of the "*Roman de la Violette*" and the "*Heures*" of Anne of Brittany, which show us gardens exactly representing Chaucer's descriptions. In one, a square garden is surrounded by high walls in which a small door leads to a country landscape beyond. Within the walls runs a hedge of roses, guarded by high trellis work, around a central square plot where a lady and her maidens are making garlands. The other picture shows a dame gathering herbs, perhaps for either poison or love-philtres (as was too common a

more

practice), and these plants are growing inside the same kind of trellissed fence. There are also pictures of knights and ladies, twos and twos, taking the air in gardens as they walk mincingly hand in hand. Our later familiarity of taking the arm for support seems to have been then unknown in polite society. But in the daintier days of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, they held each other *by the finger*; and the saints in Heaven are represented as thus taking the air:

"L'une tint l'autre par les dois."

"*La Court de Paradis.*"

But of all customs connected with gardens and flowers none was more constantly in favour than the making of garlands. In all lays and fabliaux the dames and damsels seem to spend their summer days thus weaving chaplets to adorn themselves. In Chaucer's "Knight's Tale" not only Emilie but also Arcité, the knight, go out at sunrise to weave themselves garlands. Emilie goes into the garden and gathers flowers "pertye white and rede," whilst the young knight hies into the fields to seek woodbine or hawthorn for a chaplet to set upon his head. The carole was then a favourite dance in which the dancers formed a ring holding each other's hands. Walter of Bibbesworth describes ladies dancing the carole crowned with garlands of the blue-bottle flower:

"Mener karole

Desoux chapeau de blaverole."\*

\* See "The Homes of Other Days," p. 301.

A "fayre quadrant" seems insisted on by Chaucer and other poets as the true shape of a garden. Thus Lydgate (1375-1462) describes his rich churl's garden as being

"Of lengthe and breadthe alike square and longe,  
Hegged and dyked to make it sure and stronge."

Lastly, although not strictly belonging to the garden, we may notice the cherry fairs or feasts, which were held with great mirth during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Most likely the jocund English folk gathered together in the great cherry orchards, for the feasts were held when the fruit was ripe. In the reign of Henry IV., Occleve says:

"Thy lyfe, my sone, is but a chery-feire."

And Gower writing still earlier in the fourteenth century thus comforteth his mind in affliction:

"Sumtyme I drew into memoyre,  
How sorrow may not ever laste,  
And so cometh hope in at laste,  
Whan I non other foode knowe;  
And that endureth but a throwe,  
Ryght as it were a chery feste."



## 2.—ELIZABETHAN GARDENS.

THE days were gone by when young knights and fair ladies went into the castle gardens to weave themselves chaplets of flowers, and therewith crowned their heads, as had done stern Roman men in the ages before them. The merry minstrels were long mute, who had carolled so sweetly of taking the air when flowers were blossoming and woods were green, and all the world was young.

"Whan corn ripeth in every steode,\*  
Merry it is in field and hyde.†

\* \* \* \*

The grapes hongon on the vyne,  
Sweet is true love and fyne."

\* Place. † Meadow.

There is a breath of freedom, of deep woods and wide wolds, a rustle of sunny cornfields and a large love of nature in their singing. After being cramped within castle walls, their spirits exulted in the width and air and sunshine of the outer world, when nature was unbound from winter's grip of cold and snow and frost.

But now England had become more civilized and sedate, and daily life probably far more pleasant. We do not find hints in the Elizabethan poetry that it was any longer a favourite pastime of women to "play all the longe daye" in the garden. Other diversions, more varied occupations, filled up their wider existence. Nevertheless, in good Queen Bess's still hearty age the love of gardens had by no means died out; and in summer weather, when guests were bidden by some cheerful host, the company would very likely dine in the fair banqueting house, set on a mound in the midst of the garden, as Lord Bacon describes it, afterwards pacing in the cool of the evening among the "knotted" flower-plats. Here grew the various flowers cited by Ben Jonson, Drayton, Spenser and others, in long chronicles of sweet names, which are at times, however, mere singing catalogues of the garden rather than poetry.

Take, for instance, a description by Gawain Douglas (1475-1522), which, though earlier than the time in question, is nevertheless a good illustration of this style coming later into vogue; it is also in itself a slight sketch of a Tudor garden:

"The blooming hawthorn clad his prickles all;  
Full of fresh sproutings the wine-grapes young  
Along the trellis did on twistis hang.

\* \* \* \*

The daisy did unbraid her crownal small,  
And every flower unlappéd in the dale.

In battle-bearing blossoms the thistle wild,  
The clover, trefoil, and the camomile,  
The flour-de-luce forth spread his heavenly hue;  
Rose damask and columbine black and blue:  
Sere-downies small on dandelion sprang  
The young green bloomed strawberry leaves among:  
Gay gilliflowers thereon leavis unshut;  
Fresh primrose and the purple violet;  
The rose-buds putting forth their head  
'Gan burst and kiss their vermeil lippis red;  
Curled scarlet leaves, some shedding both at once,  
Raised fragrant smell amidst from golden grains;  
Heavenly lilies, with curling toppis white,  
Opened and shew their crestis redemyte."

How any garden lover nowadays would shudder at seeing dandelion seed-balls, "sere-downies" as is their delightfully expressive old name, raising their fluffy heads in the strawberry-beds, ready to be blown abroad by every passing puff of breeze. But what a quaint touch in the description of morning is that of the daisy *unbraiding* her white head that had been tightly plaited at night, and all the flowers "unlapping in the dale."

Stephen Hawes (1480), in his "Pastime of Pleasures," thus describes a "glorious" garden. La Bel Pucel is sitting therein in a "herber," weaving herself a "girlonde that is veray sheene." The garden itself is described as being

"Wyth Flora painted and wrought curiously,  
In divers knottes of marvaylous gretenes;  
Rampane Lyons stood up wondrously,  
Made all of herbes with dulcet sweetness,  
With many designs of marvaylos likeness."

Furthermore there was also a fountain "resplendyschaunte." The custom here described of clipping shrubs into fantastic, often barbarous, shapes flourished still more in succeeding years, and later we shall find it alluded to by Lord Bacon.

This garden of La Bel Pucel was also "fayre and quadrant," as a matter of course.

Our ancestors in Queen Elizabeth's days seem to have had two leading ideas concerning gardens. The first was, that these should be conformed in some degree to the architecture of the house to which they were attached; therefore either a square or an oblong, in any case a rectangular shape was necessary to its stiff stateliness. The second canon ordained that every inch of this space should be filled with flower-plats, hedges and alleys, the latter often pleached closely overhead by means of interwoven roses or creepers. In this portion of the garden not an inch of sward was left, although in adjoining portions of the pleasure-ground the Elizabethan taste approved also of greens, mazes, pleasaunces and what Lord Bacon calls heaths or wildernesses.

The flower-beds called "knots" were all laid out in precise

geometrical patterns. Nature, who had been still wooed to preside as mistress in the half-woodland gardens Chaucer sometimes described, was now clipped and tutored and kept everywhere in close bounds by man's art. Shakespeare refers, in "*Love's Labour Lost*," to this prevailing fashion of stiff designs in flower-beds: "In the west corner of thy curious knotted garden." And Milton, later, with what seems rebuking comparison, refers to the same taste, that still held ground. When describing the garden of Eden, he tells us that there grew

"Flowers, worthy of paradise, which not nice art  
In beds and curious knots, but nature born  
Pour'd forth profuse on hill and dale and plain."  
"*Paradise Lost*."

Truly Adam, "the grand old gardener, and his wife" would have been much surprised at such a stiff kaleidoscopic arrangement of flower "knots," surrounded or intersected by hedges trimmed with constant care, and here and there clipped and twisted into a griffin, or an impossible bird, or a set of chess pieces. These hedges still survive in some old gardens, curiosities of bygone pains and skill; living links between the dead generation, that rustled past them in courtly ruff and farthingale, and ourselves, who saunter by in easy nineteenth century carelessness, wondering at such freaks of taste.

The Elizabethan men and women had no small knowledge of flowers, judging even only from old Gerarde, the herbalist, who lived towards the latter end of the sixteenth century. He seems to have had friends, or employed agents, on the continent, who supplied him with any plant new to British soil, and since Chaucer's days many more had been added to the list of our garden denizens. The following description of a garden by Phineas Fletcher shows a great advance from the days when buttercups, dandelions, daisies and white nettles were reckoned as worthy of care as well as love.

"The rose engrained in pure scarlet die,  
The lilly fresh and violet belowe,  
The marigold and cheerful rosemarie,  
The Spartan myrtle, whence sweet gum doth flowe;  
The purple hyacinth and fresh costmarie,  
And saffron sought for on Cilician soil,  
And laurell th' ornament of Phœbus' toill.

"Fresh rhododaphne and the sabine floure,  
Matching the wealth o' the ancient frankincense;  
And pallid ivie, building his own bowre;  
And box, yet mindful of his own offence,  
Red amaranthus, luckless paramour,  
Ox-eye, still green, and bitter patience  
Ne wants there pale narcisse, that in a well  
Seeing his beaultie, in love with it fell.

"The hedge green satin, pink'd and cut, arrays;  
The heliotrope unto cloth of gold aspires;  
In hundred coloured silks the tulip plays:  
Th' imperial flower his neck with pearl attires;  
The lily high her silver grogram rears;  
The pansy her wrought velvet garment bears;  
The red rose, scarlet, and the Provence damask wears."

Giles Fletcher (1584-1623) describes a garden that truly seems strangely devised, but no doubt he was accurately showing the taste of the time:

"The garden like a lady fair was cut  
That lay as if she slumbered in delight."

To represent the azure vault of heaven above her head, this was "sembled" by a large round flower-bed, set thick with flower-de-luce. Red and white roses were planted to set forth her complexion, and

"For her tresses marigolds were spilt,"

which latter were figured to be caught up and held in check by g en fillets—can these have been low hedges, or box borders? This floral dame was likewise fashioned to appear leaning her head upon a hilly bank, "on which the bower of vain delight was built." Perhaps this last allusion may be explained by what Lord Bacon says of the frequent custom of placing a little temple or arbour on an artificial mound in gardens. The whole must have been to our modern thinking a childish conceit, curious rather than pleasing. Like the former constant weaving of garlands, so the gathering of sweet "strewings," or flowers and branches to decorate the house, seems still to have survived in Elizabethan days; but even according to Herrick, that lover of old customs and most merry priest, the latter practice seems to have been now chiefly kept on feasts and holidays. Yet in Elizabeth's golden age flowers seem to have been invested with new meaning, and to speak in poetic speech to the minds of even common folk; this is a new form of the love in which they were held by the English, which does not appear in the pages of earlier writers. Shakespeare is full of allusions to such a symbolism that was a real and living language of flowers, now a dead tongue, a hollow sham, mimicking feebly the old beautiful reality.

Take rosemary first. Our Elizabethan ancestors connected it with chastity and remembrance; and the "cheerful" plant, as Spenser calls it, was always seen at weddings and burials. Thus in the old ballad of the "Bride's Good Morrow:"

"Young men and maids do ready stand  
With sweet rosemary in their hand—  
A perfect token of your virgin's life,  
To wait upon you they intend  
Unto the church to make an end:  
And God make thee a joyfull wedded wife."

## 604 *Early English Gardens and Elizabethan Gardens.*

And Shakespeare has :

"Marry come up, my dish of chastity with rosemary and bays ;"

while Herrick sings to the rosemarie branch :

"Grow for two ends, it matters not at all,  
Be 't for my bridal or my burial."

It was an old custom to place a sprig of rosemary in the hand of a corpse, as a last "In Memoriam," and sprigs of it were also scattered on the coffin and planted on the grave ; when, if a shower of rain refreshed the slips soon after planting, it was deemed a happy omen of the future state of the deceased.

"Blessed is the corpse which the rain rains on."

Sir Thomas More "lett rosemarine run alle over his garden walle" because it was sacred to memory and therefore to friendship, as also because his bees loved it. And in the Elizabethan collection of ballads called "A Handful of Pleasant Delites" we find :

"Rosemarie is for remembrance  
Betweene us daie and night,  
Wishing that I might alwaies have  
You present in my sight."

Lastly comes poor Ophelia, distributing the flowers of her posy and saying, with perhaps some glimmering of her own tragic death so near :

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance ; pray you, love, remember : and there is pansies, that's for thoughts."

Again, rue (or herb of grace), because of a likeness of name, was taken as the symbol of ruth or repentance. And, repentance being a blessed sign of grace working in the human heart, rue became by a sequence of ideas "herb o' grace ;" which beautiful old name was afterwards vulgarized into herbigrass. To quote Ophelia again :

"There's rue for you ; and here's some for me—we may call it herb o' grace o' Sundays—you may wear your rue with a difference."

And again the gruff but pitiful old gardener in "King Richard II." says, as the queen leaves the spot where he has been ordering the binding up of the dangling "apricocks :

"Here she did fall a tear ; here in this place  
I'll set a bank of rue, sour herb o' grace :  
Rue, even for ruth, here shortly shall be seen,  
In the remembrance of a weeping queen."

Violets, too, then had a deeper meaning than that of mere nun-

## *Early English Gardens and Elizabethan Gardens.* 605

like shyness, which is all most modern poets have seen in them. Thus we find:

"Violet is for faithfulness  
Which in me shall abide;  
Hoping likewise that from your heart  
You will not let it slide."

*Clement Robinson.*

Fennel signified apparently a want of truth, and poor Ophelia gave these and columbines away perhaps with method in her madness. Tuberville writes to his suspicious love on her sending him some flowers:

"Your fennel did declare  
(As simple men can show),  
That flattery in my breast I bear,  
Where friendship ought to grow."

And Browne tells us of the columbine,

"The columbine in tawny often taken  
Is then ascribed to such as are forsaken:"

Here follows a little pastoral courtship in flowers, fit for fair shepherdesses and their swains:

"He to his lass his lavender hath sent,  
Showing her love and doth requital crave;  
Him, rosemary, his sweetheart, whose intent  
Is, that he her should in remembrance have,  
Roses his youth and strong desire express;  
Her sage doth show his sovereignty in all;  
Thyme, truth."

*Drayton.*

Lastly, "lad's love" was the old name for southernwood.

Leaving these symbolical posies, let us consult finally the best of all authorities on Elizabethan gardens, Lord Bacon himself, than whom none has ever written a more delightful essay on Adam's occupation—beginning thus: "God Almighty first planted a garden; and, indeed, it is the purest of all human pleasures." And again he says, "Men come to build stately, sooner than to garden finely, as if gardening were the greater perfection." Beginning in lordly style he enjoins that for the royal ordering of gardens there ought to be one for each month of the year. Thereupon he cites a profusion of flowers for each season, a knowledge in which, however, he was almost equalled by the poets of his day; for Ben Jonson, Drayton, the Fletchers and many more seem to have prided themselves in quoting as many flowers in their lines as ever bloomed in the old-fashioned knots of their gardens. "And because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (when it comes and goes like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight than to know what

be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air." Roses, damask and red, hold fast their smells, he says, even in a morning's dew; but best of all flowers for smell is the double white violet, next the musk-rose. Then he cites "the strawberry leaves dying with a most excellent cordial smell;" next, the flower of the vines, which he likens to the little dust of bent-grass. After these, which seems strange, come such strong-smelling flowers as wall-flowers, pinks, &c., while he recommends that whole alleys should be set with thyme, burnet and mint, which, when crushed underfoot, perfume the air delightfully. Have any of us, nowadays, noticed this smell of dying strawberry leaves, which Lord Bacon prefers to honeysuckle or sweetbriar? Other writers besides myself have been puzzled by it; and as a child I remember straying on mellow autumn days beside the strawberry-beds, sniffing vainly at the decaying leaves and wondering what the great philosopher meant. I had been given an old small copy of his *Essays*, bound in black leather, its pages yellow with age, and into this I dipped with all the pride and eagerness of a discoverer, imagining few besides myself could ever have read so old a book, and studying with especial delight his fancied noble palace and gardens in the essay on gardening.

Lord Bacon liked the pleasure grounds to be divided into three portions. That next the house was a green, "because nothing is more pleasant to the eye than green grass finely shorn." This was to have covered alleys for shade on either side leading to the garden. "As for the making of knots, or figures, with divers coloured earths, that they may lie under the windows of the house on that side which the garden stands, they be but toys; you may see as good sights many times in tarts. The garden is best to be square, encompassed on all the four sides with a stately arched hedge." These arches were to be about fourteen feet high, with the lower portions of hedge between just the same width as the arches. Over every arch should be a little turret to hold a cage of birds, and between the arches "some other little figure, with broad plates of coloured glass gilt for the sun to play on" (these, or metal globes, that glitter in the sunlight, are still favourite ornaments of gardens in Holland). For the interior of the garden Bacon advises this should not be too bushy or full of work. As for "images cut out in juniper or other garden stuff, they be for children. Little low hedges, round like welts, with some pretty pyramids, I like well." In the very middle he wished a fair mound, thirty feet high, with three broad ascents and alleys (the latter apparently encircling it), and on the top of this was to be a fine banqueting house, with neat chimneys and not too much glass. He also gives precise directions. The fountains should be kept freshly-flowing and clear, and adorned (as usual, he adds) with gilt or marble images. Also there should be a bathing-pool, finely paved, and embellished with coloured glass or things of such lustre, and



surrounded by low rails and statues. There were also to be fruit trees and arbours in this garden.

For the third and furthest portion of ground it was to be a heath, imitating a natural wildness. "Trees I would have none in it, but some thickets made only of sweetbriar and honeysuckle, . . . and the ground set with violets, strawberries and primroses. . . . I like also little heaps, in the nature of mole-hills (such as are in wild heaths), to be set, some with thyme, some with pinks, some with germander." And on the top of these little mounds he advised standard bushes of red currant, gooseberry or rosemary should be pricked in; but kept small with cutting.

And herewith I take my leave of Lord Bacon, and of Elizabethan gardens.

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## RED ROSES.

By MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER.

AUTHOR OF "PURPLE AND FINE LINEN," "A LEADER OF SOCIETY," "THE MATCH OF THE SEASON," ETC., ETC.

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### PART I.

THE HONOURABLE MISS CLIFTON.

LONDON in the season, dusty and glary, and with a temperature of ninety degrees in the shade, but possessing with all these drawbacks immense attraction for the pleasure-loving, excitement-seeking million, to whose taste the crowded balls and receptions and Row are a thousand times more in consonance than all the beauty that nature ever showed. Fashion holds her court, and her votaries flock obsequiously around loth to quit the charmed circle, till forced to do so by the mandate of their imperious duty.

But though the glitter and gaiety have many worshippers there are some few human creatures who are capable of perceiving the real hollowness and falsity of "the season." Some few human creatures who can trace a mask for an aching heart in the smile that wreaths beauty's lip, and who can detect an empty purse and even a hungry pang beneath a coat that is a *chef d'œuvre* of a Conduit Street or Bond Street tailor. But these discerners are people who have lived long in the world, who have felt its knocks and brunts, and who have learnt by experience that according to the preacher "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." Alan Harcourt, one of our youngest colonels in a crack Guards' Regiment, happens to be one of the brotherhood of sceptics in genuine enjoyment, as leaning at a window of a big house in Brook Street, his gaze rests wearily on the incessant stream of passers-by to the park.

His thoughts at this moment are certainly not cheerful, and this may possibly impart a more jaundiced aspect to life than it usually wears. As he stands in a listless attitude, the glare of noon falls full on him, but fails to lighten the shadow on his brow.

He is a tall man, broad-shouldered and carrying himself haughtily as a rule. And he has a quiet earnest face that owes its attraction to a pair of deep honest eyes, and a smile rare and grave, but just the sort of smile women find irresistible.

At the furthest end of the room, lounging idly upon a sofa, is the woman he loves.

Her hands, white, small, aristocratic, and gleaming with jewels, toy with a large fan. Her form is slender, and she has a lovely sparkling face and red lips that laughter and sneers alike become.

Her dark grey eyes are apparently bent on the ground, but from under the black curling lashes she casts frequent glances at her companion, while an expression triumphant and even mocking crosses her mouth as she marks evident signs of indecision about him.

She is the Honourable Cecil Clifton, she is the belle of the season, and she has been engaged to this good-looking Guardsman for one year.

"And it is really your determination to break with me, Cecil?" Harcourt says after a long silence, but less in a tone of interrogation than as if he was speaking in a dream. His eyes go out eagerly and pleadingly towards her, but her head is studiously averted.

"It is!"

There is not the faintest falter in the well-modulated voice, not a symptom of softening, no quiver on the proud red lips, and Harcourt feels his heart sink down like a lump of lead as he strives vainly to read a line of relenting in the exquisite face that has grown dearer to him than life. It is true he can only judge of her feelings by the surface, and that is as hard and cold as marble, or perchance the rapid throbbing of her heart beneath her muslin bodice, and the icy coldness of her fingers, nervously marring the beauty of her fan, might prove panaceas for the pain he suffers, and which blanches his features, and makes existence utterly valueless in his eyes.

Cecil's downcast glance is genuine enough now; not for worlds would she meet her lover's look, aware that by doing so she will imperil the carrying out of her resolution. Her cheek flushes and pales alternately, but this is the only sign of perturbation in her breast, and Harcourt, utterly unable to sustain silence or calmness longer, crosses the long room with rapid strides and kneeling before her clasps her hands tightly in his own.

His voice is very low and broken, and listening to its tones no one could doubt how precious to him is the suit he presses.

"Listen to me, Cecil, darling Cecil! I can't believe you yet! I *can't* bring myself to credit that you can cruelly, heartlessly, ay, even wickedly wreck a man's whole life as you are doing now for a mere chimera of the brain, a miserable folly! No! don't turn away from me, but hear at any rate what I have to say, and even if I fail in shaking your resolve, let me, Cecil, for the last time tell you all that is in my heart; the vilest criminals are allowed to plead for dear life, and surely I may be allowed equal privilege with them!"

His accents grow less brave and firm each moment, but nerving himself up he tries to go on.

"For twelve months, Cecil, we have been engaged, you have been

my only thought by day, the woman whose face has hovered near me in my dreams by night. To say that I *love* you would be untrue, for love in the common acceptation of the word is pale and faint and mean in comparison to what I feel, Cecil! Mine is worship, I believe, and not love! Yes! you may smile at the bare notion of one so quiet, prosaic as I am being capable of such a feeling, but you have yet to learn that it is natures like my own—slow to move, unimpressionable as a rule, cold and hard if you will—that once aroused into passion, yield up that passion only in death.”

His words are eloquent with feeling, and sincerity shines out of his earnest eyes, but neither words nor eyes have power to touch the woman he loves.

Like a statue she sits and listens, but the lovely white arms that have been wont to steal round his neck remain motionless, and the mouth that has whispered softly in his ear is mute.

“Cecil! I pray you think of the misery you are dooming me to. Think of the past time when loving words have fallen from your lips and your sweet eyes have looked into mine. Child, pause before you decide, and don’t play with a human heart as with a football. You’ll grieve when I am gone, Cecil! And your heart will yearn for the love that is past, will consent to a prayer gone by. Recall your determination, or I shall think your reasons for throwing me over are not the real ones. I shall believe, Cecil, that some one has come between you and me!”

“Miss Montressor.”

And as she speaks the name there is a harsh jar in her tone, and her lips curl.

Harcourt starts up from his knees and lets go the hands he holds.

For an instant anger and impatience are the chief expressions on his face, but they quickly pass away leaving a weary and hopeless look behind them.

This bright summer’s day has brought him a deal of unhappiness and vexation as well. He has been grappling with unreasonable fancies, vainly trying to argue with her, and striving hard to ignite a spark of right feeling in her bosom on the subject of contention between them.

Jealousy, and a jealousy that is more difficult to combat for the very reason that it is utterly groundless and wild, has taken root within her, and all his arguments are futile to eradicate it.

But he loves her passionately, and he cannot bear to let her drift away from him without a desperate struggle to keep her. The name she uttered has made her face cloud darkly. All the sparkle has died out of it and a hard sullen line runs round her mouth, whilst on the long black lashes tears, evoked by the green-eyed monster, glisten brightly in spite of her efforts to keep up an indifferent exterior. These tears are Harcourt’s forlorn hope. They show at any rate that he yet has some power over her. So he sits down beside her, but the arm that creeps round her waist

is put aside impatiently, and she shrinks away from him. Harcourt feels the movement more than sees it, and brave strong soldier as he is, it tortures him so that he could cry like a child.

Hitherto the path of love has been smooth for them, but now a gigantic struggle has arisen, and Cecil or conscience are at stake. As he sits drinking in with rapt gaze the beauty that his soul as well as his eyes worship, he feels love mighty, omnipotent, over-weighting the balance. What on earth could make up to him for the woman he loves to distraction? And a little while, and sooner than give up the blessed hope of possessing her, he would have yielded to her wishes and lost his own self-respect, but shaking off the glamour she has for him, and collecting his failing strength, he resolves to follow the dictates of honour and give up love.

"Cecil! You know quite well that Phyllis Montessor can in no way interfere between you and me. You *know* that you have all my heart, and that the affection I give her is that which a man gives to a young sister. My whole soul is yours, and it will be a death blow to everything to lose you; but I swore on my knees at the bedside of Phyllis Montessor's dying father that with God's help I would befriend his child, and here, Cecil, once again, although you may cast me off, I reiterate that solemn oath!"

She starts up from her seat and looks at him with flashing eyes out of which all tenderness is gone. Her cheeks are aflame, and her fingers clutched together in anger and agitation.

"Enough, Colonel Harcourt! You need say no more! It is you who have decided the future by choosing between Miss Montessor and me. I would not be your wife for all the world, with the prospect of a presence I hate, a girl I distrust shadowing my hearth and destroying the happiness of each hour of my life. I *have* loved you dearly, but I do not love you now! No divided heart for me! The man I marry must be all my own, and I'll have no interlopers in my home. Sooner than give up the unspeakable happiness of watching over Miss Montessor's welfare you prefer to place an eternal barrier between us two. So be it! You have *never* loved me, and I have been a fool to believe you did," and she sweeps haughtily past him towards the door.

Harcourt seizes her arm and arrests her steps, and glancing hastily at his white face and working features, she pauses.

"I have chosen between you and duty, Cecil! No woman on earth could take me from you, but I feel that even with you as my wife I should be an unhappy man, with conscience reproaching me perpetually for having perjured the vow made to a dying friend. I cannot send his child into the world unprotected, even though her presence will recall each moment the memory of her I have worshipped and lost. But, oh, Cecil! my life, my love! if you *will* send me from you, don't let it be in anger, but rather in pity and regret, that to preserve honour I have to yield up all that could make earth *Heaven*. Speak to me, child. Lay your

lips just once more on mine, and bid me go if it must be, but let me carry away one loving look. Let your voice fall kindly once more on my ears."

Not one glance; not one word. The dark grey eyes glitter, but there is no soft light in them, and Cecil Clifton's white teeth press down on her lip so that its trembling shall not be seen.

Alan Harcourt pulls himself up to his full height and confronts her. For a minute or two he seems to study feature by feature of her face with a strange and wistful expression on his own countenance, but the study is unsatisfactory. Cecil's face, like her heart, seems to have suddenly become a sealed book to him.

"Good-bye!" he says brokenly, "and if prayers of mine can avail, you will be a happy woman, Cecil. You know best if you are acting for your happiness, and in spite of all I suffer, I sincerely hope you are right. But if at any time," and he bends towards her while his tone grows softer and his lips quiver, "when your judgment is cooler, and reflection shows you how cruelly you are punishing me for a mere fancy, Cecil, write to me and I shall be at your feet."

"I shall never write to you," she answers curtly.

"Then promise me one thing. It is the last request I shall ever make you. If anything should happen to me, if I should be dying perchance, when you get a bunch of red roses, you will come to me? It is only a fancy of mine, a sickly sentimental fancy, some men would think; but, nevertheless, promise me that you will accede to what I ask!"

"I promise."

He looks at her steadily a moment, then without one backward glance leaves the room.

"Alan! forgive me; come back!" she cries, and with tears blinding her eyes she rushes to the door and then to the window, but only in time to see Harcourt's tall figure turn quickly down a quiet by-street.

It is all over—he is gone—and she is sure that he will never come back to her, so she goes back to the sofa, and burying her face in the velvet cushion, sobs like a child.

The sudden opening of a door behind her rouses her and stills her sobs. For an instant she fancies Harcourt has returned, but the sight of her mother's figure sends the blood surging over her face, and ashamed of the emotion she has given way to, she averts her head and feigns to read.

But Lady Estcourt's shrewd glance detects the traces of tears at once, and anxious to discover if a serious rupture has occurred between Cecil and her lover, she forgets her usual circumlocution, and questions pettishly:

"Where is Colonel Harcourt?"

"Gone!"

"Gone!—where?"

"I don't know."

"When does he return?"

"Never!" and with this ominous word sounding a death knell to all her hope and happiness, Cecil bursts into a torrent of tears, and makes no effort to hide them.

The desire of Lady Estcourt's heart is fulfilled. To break off the engagement between her daughter and Harcourt has been the end and aim of her life for some time, but she has hardly known how to set about its accomplishment. Harcourt is neither affluent nor aristocratic enough to please her, and personally she dislikes him. She is a thorough woman of the world, full of wiles and deception that to Harcourt's honest nature are detestable, and though he forces himself to be civil to her, he cannot disguise his real sentiments always.

Lady Estcourt has repined that her daughter, beautiful and wealthy, should draw so poor a prize in the lottery of marriage, so while Cecil weeps, her mother smiles quietly and complacently.

"I have noticed for some little time that your manner to Colonel Harcourt has been cold. Cecil, what has he been doing to anger you?"

"I am not angry with him in the least," the girl says with a deep sigh.

"Then it is jealousy! You are jealous, of course! and of that Miss Montessor, and who can wonder at it? It is very seldom that such affection as Colonel Harcourt evinces for a girl like Miss Montessor—an actress, too—is purely paternal or fraternal, or whatever he may call it! especially when he must be gratified by the excessive fondness the young woman so openly demonstrates for her 'guardian!' A guardian is such a safe name, you know. Loving you as I do, my dearest Cecil, I confess I have been most unhappy at your unfortunate entanglement. The fact is you are much too pretty and admired to be made the recipient of a divided heart."

Cecil winces under this thrust. It is just a repetition of her own words to Harcourt.

"Why should Colonel Harcourt profess to care for me if he loves another?" she asks petulantly.

"Colonel Harcourt, caught by your beauty, doubtless fancied himself in love with you, and when he found his liking returned tenfold, of course both honour and pity forbade his breaking his word until some good opportunity for release offered. Your jealousy has made that opportunity, and probably salving his conscience with the thought that it is *your* fault a rupture has occurred, he has gone away feeling a free and happy man again!"

Cecil trembles with passion as she listens, and for a moment Harcourt is a really miserable man, for the woman he loves so passionately, *hates* him.



"*Pity* made him keep his word to me!" she ejaculates in a hard metallic voice, and she plucks from her bosom some red roses that Harcourt had given her a few days back and stamps on them.

"Colonel Harcourt shall not have my unhappiness to lie as a burden on his conscience! As long as I believed in his love I gave him mine, but hearts, thank Heaven, are not brittle like glass, to be broken at a man's will. There, mother, 'Richard is himself again.' I shall never be Cecil Harcourt now, so prepare yourself at once for the onerous task of finding a titled husband for your daughter. I give you fair warning that nothing but strawberry leaves will satisfy me!"

Cecil's sudden liveliness does not deceive such an old stager as Lady Estcourt, but her cue is to believe in it.

"I *am* so glad to find that your attachment to *that* man is not so strong as I feared. There are such a lot of men about town more eligible than he is, and you will soon like some one else a thousand times more than you imagined you loved him!"

"Never!" Cecil mutters. The day is growing on, the sun is getting lower, and yet she lingers near the window in her morning attire, and with her hair pushed unbecomingly off her hot temples.

"Cecil, I think it is getting late," Lady Estcourt murmurs presently. "We have some people coming to dinner, you know."

But Cecil absorbed in her own thoughts does not hear a word.

"Cecil! I believe Sandilands is going to dine here. Do you intend to stand there all night fretting for a man who does not care a fig for you, instead of making yourself presentable to other people?"

"For other people—read Duke of Sandilands," Cecil answers with a sneer. "All right, mother:

'Tis good to be merry and wise;  
'Tis good to be honest and true;  
'Tis good to be off with the old love  
Before one is on with the new!"

Eh, mother?" and stooping she picks up Harcourt's poor crushed roses, and thrusting them into her bodice, hastily leaves the room.

An hour later, in the freshest of toilettes, her eyes bright and cloudless, and smiles on her scarlet lips, she sits by the duke's side, apparently as brilliant and happy as if no such person as Alan Harcourt had ever touched her heart and then left her for the sake of another woman.

## PART II.

## HARCOURT'S HOME-COMING.

PHYLLIS MONTRESSOR, actress, is a little blonde, with a pair of serious blue eyes and a shower of bright hair. She is the daughter of one Henry Montessor, born gentleman, but actor by profession, and a determination to go on the stage has grown up with her in spite of her guardian's prejudices.

She is as good as gold, though her pretty face brings her temptations, and she is full of love and gratitude to her two protectors, Harcourt and his mother.

She is home for a little holiday at the Hertfordshire house where Mrs. Harcourt resides, and on this particular evening she hovers about with a basket of flowers, filling each vase or glass she comes across, and looking like the Queen of Flowers herself with her ripe red lips and rich glowing cheeks.

And Mrs. Harcourt, lying back in her armchair, watches her with a smile.

"One would think some grand gala event was in prospect by the pains you are taking to adorn the room, child!"

"And is not Alan's coming always a grand gala event both to you and me?" Phyllis asks. "He has not been here for ages; couldn't get leave, he always says. I am dying to see him again and to know whether he has been enjoying himself—but of course he has."

A shadow passes over Mrs. Harcourt's brow. Adoring her only son, and trembling lest anything should happen to disturb the even current of his life, she is given to fancying trials and troubles for him which are often but the offsprings of a too anxious imagination. In the great event of his life, marriage, she has been wofully disappointed. In spite of Cecil Clifton's beauty and heiress-ship, Harcourt's mother, her wits sharpened by infinite love, detects faults in her future daughter-in-law that portend anything but a cloudless life for him. But the die is cast; Cecil is to be his wife, and Mrs. Harcourt thrusts aside regret and hopes for the best. She had always cherished an idea that Phyllis would be Alan's choice, and the news of his engagement to the other girl came like a thunderbolt.

"I trust Alan *has* enjoyed himself," she says after a pause; "but there is no certainty of happiness in this world."

And tears start in her eyes, while Phyllis's eyes grow misty by way of sympathy.

"Phyllis, do you like Cecil Clifton?" she asks suddenly.

Phyllis flushes scarlet, and lowers her lids a moment before she replies.

"Yes, I like her," she says hesitatingly; "that is, sometimes."

She is so strange, and appears now and then to hate the sight of me. Any way, she loves Alan devotedly, and if she had a million faults, I should forgive her all for the sake of that one virtue."

"Do you like Alan so much, then, that those who appreciate him find favour in your eyes?" Mrs. Harcourt questions, curious to discover the girl's real feelings.

"Like Alan! I love him with all my heart," Phyllis answers frankly; "and who could help loving him—the best, dearest, kindest fellow that ever lived. I don't believe there is a man living to compare with him, *except one, perhaps*," she murmurs *sotto voce*, with a blush, but the reservation does not reach her companion's ears.

"Here's Alan!" she cries, rushing out to meet him, but he does not take much notice of her beyond a pat on the head such as he would give a child. He walks very slowly, and his face looks terribly white and wan, though he forces a smile as he stoops and kisses his mother.

"Why, Alan, what's the matter?" Phyllis asks in dismay, and, attracted by her words, Mrs. Harcourt glances up at him hastily. The two pairs of eyes, though they are loving ones, are an ordeal he cannot stand just now, and to turn the subject he divests his pocket of two small cases. One of these he gives Phyllis. It contains a locket in the form of two hearts united by a lovers' knot and surmounted by the letters "E. F." The girl examines her gift with delight, and hands it over for Mrs. Harcourt's inspection.

"What is the meaning of 'E. F.'?" she asks.

Harcourt and Phyllis exchange glances, and into his face, in spite of his trouble, a gleam of mischief comes as he answers laughingly:

"Why, 'Ever Faithful,' of course! Phyllis is a good, true-hearted little thing, and I think the words very applicable."

Mrs. Harcourt agrees to this, but it seems to her quite a mockery to offer to one who is the victim of unrequited love such a trinket. Does Alan know how Phyllis loves him, she wonders.

"And I have something for you, mother, which I *know* you'll prize," and Harcourt drops into her lap a beautifully-painted miniature of himself.

He had taken it off Cecil's desk as he left, thinking she would not care for it when she could cast him off like this.

Mrs. Harcourt stares at the portrait aghast and then at the original.

"Alan! what on earth is the meaning of this? This picture belongs to Cecil," she exclaims anxiously.

"It means——" but Harcourt breaks down completely, and his mother sees him bow his head on the table, and fancies, horror-struck, that a sound resembling a sob bursts from his breast.

"It means that Cecil and I have parted, mother, parted for ever, and I feel as if I shall never look up again! It seems as if the

world had grown suddenly dark, and that life has no more hope or light for me. But don't you blame *her*. It is all my fault. I cannot make her so happy as she deserves to be, so it was better to say good-bye."

And this is the man, broken in spirit, weary of living, of whom Lady Estcourt had spoken so harshly, of whom even the woman he loved had been sceptical.

"I think I'll go and have a turn in the garden," he says quietly, and, too miserable, his mother lets him go without a word.

"Phyllis! *you* can console Alan for Cecil's love," she says abruptly.

"I?"

"Yes, by making Alan love you—by becoming his wife!"

Phyllis turns white, and feels like a culprit, but she is a frank, honest girl, and speaks out the truth always.

"Much as I love Alan, I could never be his wife!" she says in a very low voice, with quivering lips.

"And why not?" Mrs. Harcourt questions sharply. "Like the rest of the world, I suppose, you are apparently sincere, in reality deceitful. May I be permitted to know why it is impossible for you to become my son's wife?"

"Because I love another—I love Everard Forrester," she answers shyly.

"And does Alan know this?"

Phyllis bows her head in assent.

"I see it all. You and Alan have been in league against me. Those letters on that locket stand for 'Everard Forrester,' and not for 'Ever Faithful!'"

"They stand for both, *madre mia!* Everard and I have been engaged for months, but we have been obliged to keep it secret because his father has sworn to disinherit him if he marries an actress, so we live in hope that he may change some day and let us be happy. Alan has known all about it, but he thought a secret engagement would worry you. You will never speak to me unkindly again, will you? It will break my heart if you do!"

So Mrs. Harcourt kisses her, while the utter vanity of human desires passes through her mind as she does so. Alan is a free man; his engagement to Cecil Clifton is at an end, a desideratum which she has long had at heart, and Phyllis, the prize she has always had in view for her son's grasp, is out of her reach.

Phyllis feels a tear fall on her face with the caress she receives.

"Don't grieve so. Alan will be happy yet," she says soothingly. "I feel sure Miss Clifton will never rest till she has him back."

"If so, God grant it may be for his happiness. So good a son deserves a good wife, but to my thinking Cecil will give no more thought to a discarded lover than she does to a worn-out glove." And Harcourt, as he slowly paces up and down the garden walk, endorses his mother's opinion.

It is about five days after this that he enters the breakfast-room with an open letter in his hand, and his face whiter and more weary-looking than ever.

"Phyllis," he says, "here is news for you. Everard's father died yesterday suddenly, and Everard, master of his actions at last, comes here as soon after the funeral as he can. Let me be the first to congratulate you, my child. And, Phyllis, you can congratulate me in return. Cecil has forgotten me already; she is going to be married to the Duke of Sandilands!"

### PART III.

"ALAN! I COME!"

EVERARD FORRESTER proves no laggard in love, and before the autumnal leaves have been swept away by winter's blast, he has made Phyllis his wife, and by the end of the year she is back again from her honeymoon cheering up Mrs. Harcourt like a sunbeam before she goes away to her new home.

To Harcourt all seasons seem alike and, as the time goes on, he gets more leave from his regiment, and throws himself into the excitement of field sports in order to thrust memory away. Meanwhile, Cecil passes sleepless nights and feverish days brooding over the coming marriage—or death, as she inwardly calls it.

Strawberry leaves are a crown of thorns to her thinking now. Harcourt is in her heart and in her head, and the more she essays to drive him out the more his image seems to cling to her. The news of Phyllis Montessor's marriage awakened her to the folly of her jealousy. And hopeless—wretched now that things have gone so far—she lets herself be entirely in her mother's hands. It is at Lady Estcourt's desire that she consents to visit one of the country places which is to be her own, but when Lady Estcourt arranged that they should go and stay at Ravenshill, she did not know that it was within a few miles of Holmwood, where Mrs. Harcourt lives.

Ravenshill is a charming place, with Italian gardens and a house replete with luxury, but, like its owner, it bears rather an old-fashioned aspect. The duke is given to a little pomposity and prosiness, but in spite of it he is very popular with the fair sex. Even Cecil, though she detests him as a lover, would like and respect him as a friend. His little weaknesses are by her exaggerated into grave faults, and she shrinks from him with a repugnance which is sometimes palpable. But Sandilands, frank and straightforward himself, never dreams that the woman who has accepted him without any apparent coercion can have done so from any feeling but liking, especially as being rich she has no occasion to sell herself.

It is not a pleasant sight to witness Sandilands and his *fiancée*

pacing side by side at Ravenshill. They are as ill mated as May and December. He, with his tall gaunt figure, with the frost of age crowning his brow, and she, slender and stately, with tresses that flash beneath the sunlight.

Yet, strange to say, Sandilands is the pleasantest sight of the two, for though his gait is slouching and his features bear the marks of time, there is a certain serenity in his eyes and a genial smile on his mouth.

Cecil's haughty beauty is in as great perfection as ever, save that she is white, as white as the snowdrops that are just rearing their heads. Her lips wear a perpetual curve that savours of bitterness of spirit and her voice has grown less musical. She submits to the duke's caress although she never returns it, and when an involuntary shudder passes over her at his slightest touch, woman's art invents an excuse at once.

"We must be having some people to dinner soon," the duke says; "there's a man here I want to ask, my nearest neighbour—a capital fellow, and the best hand I know at taking a fence. Harcourt's his name. He's in the Guards, but I don't remember meeting him at your house."

"We know Colonel Harcourt slightly," Lady Estcourt breaks in promptly; "but let Ravenshill begin its hospitality after Cecil's marriage, I beg of you. At present my own health requires quietude, and I shall be grateful for it."

The duke consents of course, while he wonders to what degree of robustness his future mother-in-law aspires, since with such blooming cheeks and so portly a form she professes to be an invalid.

It wants but three days to the wedding, and Cecil counts each moment with a desperate feeling at her heart. The sun has gone down, and the chill air stirs the leaves, but glad to leave the house that always seems to her like a prison, she strolls slowly in the grounds.

As the shadows slant down, Lady Estcourt grows anxious, for the duke has been out hunting all day and is delayed long beyond his usual hour of return. But fears are dispelled at last by his riding slowly up the drive. His features are so grave, however, that they elicit a remark from Lady Estcourt at once.

"Anything the matter?"

"Very much the matter," he says as he dismounts; "we had an excellent run, but the sport was spoiled by a fearful accident: a man, the best rider in the county, too, crushed under his horse. We picked him up and carried him home—poor fellow; he just breathed and that's all."

"Who is he?"

"Harcourt—you know—whom we——"

But he is interrupted by a shrill cry of anguish that seems to rend the air.

"Alan!" and Cecil falls senseless on the ground.

The wedding day arrives, but the bride-elect raves in paroxysm of brain fever, and the duke, as he listens to the name of "Alan," that the poor, pale lips keep repeating, feels his anger in having been duped melt in compassion for the sufferer.

And while Cecil hovers between life and death, Harcourt slowly recovers, and when he is sufficiently restored to health to be able to creep about the house, the duke visits him. Those who see him after this interview can hardly credit that he is the same man who rose that day, pale and white and spiritless; a bright light is in his eyes, a smile on his mouth and hope in his heart. He has heard that Cecil loves him, and that he or death will possess her, and he never doubts that she will live.

Confident that happiness has come to him at last, he goes to Ravenshill to claim his wife, but his heart sinks as he bends over her and sees not only a pallid face and wasted form, but eyes burning with a feverish light and parched lips dropping incoherent words.

"Cecil, beloved!" he cries, taking her into his arms. "See, I am here. No one can separate us now—my own—my *wife*."

"*Wife*."

This word strikes a chord in her brain. Shivering all over, she starts from his hold and clasping her thin hands together she fixes her gaze on his face.

"Wife? No, Sandilands, no. Not *your* wife. I cannot! I *dare* not be your wife, for I love Alan—Alan who is dead—*crushed*! But I shall see him again, not here, but *there*." And she points upwards, opening her eyes wide.

Harcourt looks round in despair. Is there nothing—*nothing* that can bring her back her wandering senses?

Suddenly he sees a vase of flowers on a table near, and seizing some red roses, he holds them before her eyes.

"Cecil, you promised to come to me when I sent you red roses. Keep your promise now. Come back to life and love and me, my darling, my life."

Her gaze grows rivetted on the flowers; slowly, slowly the light of reason steals into her eyes; a soft sweet smile breaks on her white lips. "Red roses," she whispers; "he has sent them to call me to him. Alan, I come!" she cries out joyfully, flinging her arms round his neck, and in that caress Cecil passes away.

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## DUCHESS FRANCES.

By SARAH TYTLER,

AUTHOR OF "CITOYENNE JACQUELINE," "SAINT MUNGO'S CITY," "LADY BELL," ETC.

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### CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST OF DICK TALBOT—MARLBOROUGH'S AGENT—A  
TARDY SUITOR.

THE depression which had fallen on Tyrconnel at the battle of the Boyne continued to weigh upon him, so that he and the French commander Lauzun declined to strike a blow for Limerick. They set sail for France, overtaking the duchess and Cherry shortly after their arrival at St. Germain, where James II. and Mary of Modena held their court in exile, still buoyed up by the vain hope of fresh and more successful attempts to regain—not a lost love, but three kingdoms. Louis had given the royal refugees a princely and cordial reception. So long as the noble castle on the hill, the old hunting seat of Francis I. and Henry IV. looking down on the smiling valley of the Seine and commanding the leafiest shades, the most gigantic and hoary trees France could boast, was but a temporary refuge, a resting place for the rallying of forces and maturing of schemes which must triumph in the end, St. Germain was no very dreary quarters. The little town at its base afforded accommodation for a small colony of English, Scotch and Irish in exile with their master, waiting still with ardour for the decisive hour when they should deal a new and irresistible blow, to redeem their eclipsed fortunes.

Within the next few months better news came from Ireland. The belied Irish infantry burning to redeem their lost credit had insisted on holding Limerick against King William, and had held it to such purpose that the enemy's guns having been surprised and blown up by the gallant Irish General Sarsfield, William raised the siege and left Limerick as Richard Hamilton had quitted Derry. On that the viceroy and commander of the forces was sent back to maintain the defence of Limerick in the face of his brother-in-law Marlborough, who having declined to go to Ireland and confront his old master while James was still there, returned from Germany and prepared to bring the war to a conclusion as soon as the late king had again retired to France.

Duke Dick accepted the commission reluctantly, while no one dreamt of doubting his personal courage. But he was prematurely old and shattered in constitution, lame with gout, and pursued by the black care that had lately taken possession of him. The honour of receiving the Order of the Garter James graciously bestowed on his substitute, did not serve to drive away Dick's ominous melancholy. In January, 1691, he took leave of France, in order to set out on his expedition.

Frances was full of the restless rivalry and incessant intrigue which occupied the courtiers round her, and had scarcely time to spare from the last scandal to bid him farewell.

"I am going, my lady," said Dick, stumbling heavily up to the *tabouret* on which she was sitting, determined not to abandon it for a moment, lest she should find it whisked away from her, on the pretence that it was wanted for one of the French princesses paying a complimentary visit to Queen Mary. If French duchesses claimed *tabourets* as their right, and could not be ousted from them, Irish duchesses were not to be defrauded of the honour due to their station.

"Going," she echoed, just granting him a moment's attention. "Then haste ye back with all Ireland at your back. Good-bye, Dick," she ended cheerfully, offering him, without rising, a red cheek bone and the tip of an ear.

"Had you nothing more to say to Hamilton when you sent him away to the wars?" growled Dick.

"I am sure I cannot remember," she answered carelessly; "what should I have had to say? I was younger then and he was young too and a very pretty fellow. You and I are no longer either young or pretty, my lord; and you would not have me make a scene and be the laughing-stocks of the court."

The next instant she was furiously resisting Lady Middleton, the chief lady of the bedchamber's remonstrances on the impossibility of a private lady, French or Irish, retaining a *tabouret* when there was nothing else left for a princess of the blood. It went without saying, since the *fauteuils* were kept for kings and queens or at the utmost stretch for dauphins and dauphinesses.

Tyrconnel stood a moment after Frances had literally forgotten his existence, and looked silently at the woman whom he had loved with such passionate constancy in the middle of his vices. Then he limped slowly and painfully away. Cherry, who was watching the leave-taking from a little distance, could not help feeling sorry for him.

Eight months afterwards the news reached St. Germain's that the Duke of Tyrconnel, after supping one night as usual with the commander of the garrison at Limerick, fell down in a fit of apoplexy, from which he never rallied, dying within a few hours. Whither had passed the rollicking roystering humours of his hot youth, the fierce bravado and savage hectoring of his declining

years? The world would sound as silent without him as was the grave he filled among the graves of more peaceable men in Limerick Cathedral. The tidings gave a shock to Frances, but she had grown well accustomed to shocks, and she quickly recovered from this one, under what was to her the stimulus of new misfortunes.

Following fast on Tyrconnel's death was the fulfilment of Marlborough's pledge to subdue the revolt in Ireland, including the last stand at Limerick; as a climax to these reverses, there figured in the proscription for the year the names of Richard Earl of Tyrconnel (his dukedom was of course unratified by William), Frances Countess of Tyrconnel and even that of the innocent child Lady Charlotte Talbot. For the second time Frances was ruined and her little daughter along with her. But there were reservations to the ruin; she had the sum of money belonging to her late husband which she had brought to France, and just as fifteen years before she had flung herself at King Louis' feet and craved worldly compensation for her irretrievable loss in the death of George Hamilton, so now she cast herself at King James's feet and in spite of the presence and vehement resistance of old rivals and implacable enemies, got a promise which was fulfilled eight years later of a grant of three thousand pounds from the pension settled by Louis on his brother king. This pension was not more than ten thousand pounds a year and there were many and heavy claims on it, so that Frances was both a good and a successful beggar; she had also, in her capacity of lady-in-waiting to Queen Mary, her place and maintenance at the exiled court so long as she chose to stay there; while little Charlotte Talbot was at liberty to grow up among the small crowd of Herberts, Drummonds, Erskines and Clares, who were transplanted with their parents to foreign soil. The palace corridors, in which so many fruitless dreams were woven, baseless plans concocted and weary sighs heaved, were made gay at times by the merry games and thoughtless laughter of children. The fact was that Frances Talbot, a second time a widow, her name proscribed, her late husband's estates confiscated, herself dependent more or less on royal charity, was still at forty-three an important personage. This circumstance, as well as the possession of the lively if somewhat tart temper which distinguished her to the last, may explain the assertion that she became a great favourite with the quick enough witted queen. True, Frances' irrepressible sallies may have been a welcome relief in the stifling atmosphere of false assumption, double dealing and wrangling which grew with the years in the banished court, but the author of the smart sallies, "*La Belle Jennings*" of former days, with her overbearing temper, turbulent spirit and reckless tongue, had little in common with the Queen, the proud, formal, decorous woman, devout to superstition.

There was a significant fault which was on occasions laid

ostentatiously to the Duchess of Tyrconnel's charge, and only pardoned because of the many sterling qualities that balanced it. She was a faithful servant, an entertaining companion, a good creature, in fact, in spite of her brusque manner and hot-headed ways, but "*she had a bad habit of scribbling news incessantly to her treacherous sister, Lady Marlborough.*" Now this was an extraordinary failing when one comes to consider there was so little love lost between the sisters that their known quarrels have been brought forward to prove that by whatever means Marlborough maintained his long course of underhand dealings with the court of St. Germain, it was not by the instrumentality of his wife and her sister.

On the other hand, the characters of the two sisters must be taken into account, their unscrupulous, rampant worldliness, their capacity for daring enterprise, their devotion to what they regarded as their own and their children's interests, so that no private pique or family quarrel would be allowed to stand in the way, as it might have blinded and arrested weaker women.

Unquestionably Marlborough was not altogether in need of these female allies; he could have found other emissaries, among them the brave soldier the Duke of Berwick, James's illegitimate son, who was also Marlborough's nephew, being the son of his sister, Arabella Churchill. But Berwick was not always, or even frequently, available. He was often in the field fighting Louis' battles against King William and his generals, of whom Marlborough was the chief, while Lady Tyrconnel was at hand, without fail, settled at St. Germain, able to plead a woman's irresponsibility, and the necessity of corresponding with her only surviving sister, in case of an exposure and of France's being taken to task.

Neither could James and his queen afford to neglect the slightest hold on the mighty commander, false as he was mighty.

There was a break and a difference in these interested illicit communications when in 1692 William detected the lurking treachery of Lord and Lady Marlborough, banished them both from court, and deprived them of various offices. But what did it matter, when Princess Anne, the next Protestant heir to the childless king and queen, quitted Whitehall on the disgrace of her friends and joined them at Sion House. She had sufficient interest, one-sided and stubborn as she was, to induce William to take back Marlborough into favour, lest worse should come of it, lest the distinguished silver-tongued soldier should at once repair to St. Germain and lay his sword at the feet of his old master.

These must have been exciting moments to Frances, as well as to King James, while the issue hung in the balance. The rain of sisterly billets was not likely to be intermitted during the crisis.

In the early days at St. Germain, before hope deferred had made the heart sick, while the air was still full of confident

expectancy, and nobody knew what might happen—an invasion of England or another revolution there any day, it was not noticed that one woman, among many, looked wistfully out on the sylvan prospect and furtively watched every coming guest or messenger, as she had ceased to watch the gate of the Paris *hôtel* twenty years before. She was doomed to disappointment for a time, and then lines began to appear on her modest, peaceful brow, and hollows in her cheeks, such as had been invisible till within the last twelve months. At last a letter arrived addressed to Mrs. Peter Thornhurst, telling her that the writer was in Paris, and requesting her permission for him to come out to St. Germain, on no political mission, but on his own private business. He informed her that he had been cruelly unfortunate since he saw her in being detained in Ireland and England, and prevented without any fault of his from executing his intention, that she wotted of. Before he could withdraw from King William's army he had been thrown from his horse and laid up for many weeks with a fractured thigh. No sooner was he about again and back in England putting his house in order before he started for foreign parts, than he was attacked by a tertiary ague and unable to move hand or foot for as many months as his thigh had confined him weeks, indeed, he had doubted whether he should rise from his bed again. As soon as he was able to crawl he had come over to Paris. As his health was still indifferent and he did not reckon his lengthened presence in the French capital an altogether desirable or safe proceeding, though he was provided with a passport and had the protection of his excellency the ambassador, he begged her to answer him without delay, and not keep him waiting unnecessarily. Of course this was if his coming was not in vain, and she agreed to his wishes, as he earnestly prayed and trusted she would, for sure they two had got enough of keeping apart and seeking to burst, leastway to ignore, their bonds.

When Cherry, with unconquerable shyness and emotion, which made huge inroads on the unvexed tranquillity of her mature years, and filled her with shame for feeling so young and looking so foolish, showed the letter to her grace the Duchess of Tyrconnel, who had heard of Peter Thornhurst's unexpected appearance on their last day in Dublin, Frances laughed as immoderately as her widow's weeds and the proprieties of a palace would permit. "I always knew how it would be, Cherry, that the beef-eater had only to turn up, however tardily, and you would give him a dispensation from all his offences and fall into his arms. It is the way with women like you. Oh, no, I will not keep you from his surliness any longer; only be so good as to consider what his sulks have cost you already. Nay, it is no use if you value his polished and animated society and the brilliant life of the wife of an English squire. That is more than even my rashness would have been equal to, though he had been polite and complacent like a French husband,

and could have introduced you to sister Sal's court set. I'll miss you monstrously, and so will Charley, but we are fairly established here, and must really begin to learn to manage for ourselves."

Peter Thornhurst made sharp work, in the end, of taking away Cherry, and during the brief interval there was a kind of armed truce between him and his cousin Tyrconnel, which proved more diverting to her than to him, by the manner in which she shrugged her shoulders and tittered perceptibly over his stiff entrances and exits, while he retaliated by glaring fiercely at her.

There was an English clergyman found in Paris who had preferred James's favour for the Roman Catholics to William's favour for the Presbyterians. He consented to obviate all future mistakes and disputes by re-tying the matrimonial knot, which as it seemed had been tied fast enough before, between Peter and Cherry.

It was marvellous how soon the couple fell into their natural relations, and how completely Frances's old programme was carried out in Cherry's life as the good, happy and popular mistress of Three Elms. There had been great consternation in the Kent mansion when it was known that the squire was bringing home a French madam, but three months had not passed when madam might have come from the centre of Africa or the slums of St. Giles without diminishing Peter's kindred and the people's hearty liking for her and unbounded faith in her, the first instalment of the love and devotion which waited on her thenceforth to old age.

### CHAPTER XXIII.

#### ST. GERMAINS IN THE GATHERING SHADOWS—THE WHITE MILLINER.

HARDY endurance, with better days in view, and buoyant resolution to bring about the change, fled by degrees from St. Germain's. How could it be otherwise when lethargy and narrow fanaticism had the aging ex-king in their grip, and were closing like the waters of Lethe over his doomed head?

Mary of Modena was yet a young woman, not over thirty, with a boy prince and his later-born sister to struggle and fight for, while their adherents, though for the time subdued and scattered, were still numerous, powerful and strongly attached to the exiled house. But she was a woman of greater domestic virtue than of queenly intellect or public spirit; she was in no sense a heroic woman, though she was a good wife and mother. She was dragged down by the sluggish nature lapsing into premature dotage to which she was bound. She could barely control the spiteful cabals and petty wearing strife of her courtiers. She believed in the profound homage and specious generosity and courtesy of Louis, and allowed him to flatter and distract her from striking while the iron was hot, in order to restore her son to



his inheritance; she was a coward where her boy was concerned, and would not willingly risk him to do his duty, as Jacobites regarded it, where his party was concerned, in inspiring his followers by his presence, and sharing their privations and perils; other women might, nay, were bound to venture their sons, but her prince must be spared. She is said to have been charitable to the limit of her means to that suffering colony around her at St. Germain's, whose members had given up everything for her husband and son's dynasty, on whom the blight of enforced idleness and pinching poverty fell ere long, degrading and crushing many a gallant spirit. Need she be blamed because she and hers forgot in a measure that, while condemned to the mortification of being pensioners on a foreign king's bounty, they still dwelt in comparative ease and luxury, entertained by the magnificent galas and hunting parties of a royal entertainer, at which his royal guests had always places of honour, in which old *habituées* like Lady Tyrconnel had the satisfaction of renewing their acquaintance with many a noble ally of past days. Queen Mary's religion, to which the well-meaning, perplexed soul turned for comfort, waxed more and more into a mixture, which can very well exist, of dreamy mysticism and gross superstition.

The French king was lavish in personal favours and in vague promises, from which another man than James might have wrested something definite; but when it came to that James, who had not been deficient in energy in early life, was hardly ruffled in his equanimity when the fleet which he joined at La Hogue for the purpose of invading England never left the port. The fits of bleeding at the nose which had first shown themselves during his campaign in Ireland recurred again and again, and were accompanied by a comatose condition, from which he could only be roused by the most violent remedies. In fact, symptoms of apoplexy were conspicuous and undeniable. He ceased to derive even the heavy enjoyment he had at first taken in witnessing the magnitude of his royal brother Louis's establishments and resources. Upon the whole it was a relief to his party and gave a fresh impetus to his failing cause, when the melancholy infirm king died, meekly enough, in 1701, at St. Germain's, where he had spent, for the most part, fourteen years of exile, fourteen years of hopes and fears, with the fears at last greatly predominating. For the young Prince of Wales, as he had been called, was a likely enough lad if somewhat dull and stupid, of whom nobody knew any harm to speak of, while Anne, who in the year of her father's death succeeded her brother-in-law, William, was also written childless; and the Electress Sophia, of Brunswick, with her heirs, was but a remote and obscure offshoot from what had once been the vigorous stock of the kings of England.

In 1701, three days after Anne's accession, Marlborough was appointed her commander-in-chief. In 1702 he was created



Marquis of Blandford and Duke of Marlborough, so that Sarah Jennings became the second duchess in the family, with a securer hold on the strawberry leaves of her coronet than Frances had ever possessed. But the same year the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough's only son, a promising lad of seventeen, fell a victim to the scourge of the generation, small-pox. Frances, who never bore a son, and, like Queen Elizabeth where her cousin, the Queen of Scots, was concerned, had grudged to her rival her fine boy, thought of her little brothers, Ralph and John, dead in their infancy, and of her sister Bab, with but one dead girl lying by her mother's side, and said bitterly that the Jennings were a barren race. For what were silly girls when stout sons were denied, or stricken down in childhood and youth?

Frances' daughters were not so silly or simple as to be incapable, when backed by their husbands, of standing up for themselves against their mother, who must have been no trifle for mortal man to contend with in the person of a mother-in-law. One of Frances' daughters, Fanny, Lady Dillon, bore her mother company in her exile at St. Germain. Lady Dillon in her mature bloom was reputed one of the beauties at the court of the banished king; but the man who praised her charms was the good-natured gallant poetaster, her uncle, Count Anthony Hamilton, to whom every lass was indeed a queen. From certain stray utterances of Lady Tyrconnel, at a later date, it is very doubtful whether the company of Lady Dillon at St. Germain was any comfort to her mother, whether the two were able to preserve even a fair show of amity. The quarrelsome blood of the Jennings required doting, submissive lovers and husbands, or generous, tender-hearted kinswomen like Cherry Thornhurst to bear the tyranny. It rendered Duchess Sarah's fiery feuds with her children, grandchildren and every man, woman and child who entered into near relations with her, and did not bow implicitly to her will, the by-word of her time. It prevented any chance of peace between Duchess Frances and her refractory descendants.

Marlborough's brilliant campaigns and "glorious victories" in the Low Countries lasted from 1704 to 1711, during which the battles of Blenheim, Ramilies, Oudenarde and Malplaquet were fought and won. He received from his dazzled and grateful sovereign and country the royal manors of Woodstock and Wooton in perpetuity, while his palace of Blenheim, over the erection of which his duchess and her architect, Sir John Vanburgh, contended so wrathfully, was built at the public expense.

It is easy to guess the mingled feelings with which Duchess Frances heard of these victories; how she must have felt a *soupeçon* of awkwardness in her relationship—which she was still proudly proclaiming—to the illustrious conqueror when the enemy, whom he was always defeating with such signal *éclat*, was none other than her old patrons and present hosts—the French king and the

French nation. On the occasions of her appearance at the festivities of Versailles in the train of her queen, she could not, stout-hearted as she was, have been without certain qualms and troublesome *arrière-pensées* when she was greeted with punctilious but stony courtesy by the great Louis. Of course, she could not help having a gallant brother-in-law, the first captain of his age, in the service of Queen Anne; but the recollection was trying at times. The trial was greatly outshone, however, by the satisfaction to be drawn from the additional importance lent to her and her clandestine transactions with the splendid traitor Marlborough, by his triumphs as a general and the trumpet blasts of fame which proclaimed his achievements and honours through the length and breadth of Europe. What a feather in her cap was his glory, and the use she made of it in her daily, hourly struggles with her old enemies the Dukes of Melfort and Perth (dukedom was plentiful at St. Germain's) and with new rivals! The court, whose idle pretensions had become a shadow and a mockery, was honeycombed with crafty manœuvres and rent asunder by internal warfare. Whatever the pretensions and the manœuvres might seem to the Italian-born queen, the chronic warfare was the bane of her widowed, impoverished life, from which she was fain to seek refuge in the religious rites and austerities of the neighbouring convent of Chaillot. There, friendly nuns had received as a sacred deposit the urn containing the heavy heart of poor King James, just as they had welcomed all that was left of the restless heart of his mother, Henrietta Maria. Unfortunate mother and ill-fated son!

But clamorous self-assertion and eager, exultant interest in getting the better of her foes, constituted the very element in which Frances was most at home. What did she care for the haggard men, poverty-stricken women and ill-cared-for children lounging and dawdling listlessly, or creeping out of sight in the streets of the little foreign town? Let them pine for the grey hills where they had lorded it in all the feudal dignity and independence of Highland chieftains, or for the blue Irish lakes and dim green and purple bogs where an adoring peasantry kissed the feet of their masters; or for the peace and comfort of their forsaken English homes. If these unlucky people could do no better for themselves than go to the wall when their rightful king was under a cloud, it was none of her business. Other people had suffered greater reverses and known how to rise above them.

Frances, in her middle age, liked nothing better than the cunning stratagems and wily machinations, the mysteries, nicknames and ciphers in which she bore a part. His grace of Marlborough figured in the conspirators' elaborately composed letters under various disguises—"Mr. Armsworth" among others. The queen was sometimes "Lady Betty," sometimes "Mrs. Kelly." The young king was now "the captain," now "the silk merchant,"

now "Grant," or "Thompson," or any other common name which took the fancy of the writers. Such tricks were as marrow to Frances's bones. It is easy to see in imagination that stately terrace of St. Germain's haunted by a little woman, no longer young, no longer beautiful, but with an air of indescribable distinction and inexhaustible energy. She is oblivious of the sylvan charm of the woods, the valley, the winding river, and only intent on securing a confabulation with some man of note among the exiles, such as the Duke of Powys, or Lord Middleton, or on being the first to hail the arrival of a messenger with the delightful enigma of a reply to one of those letters, as elaborately deep and transparently shallow as the missive which had called it forth.

Neither in youth, nor in advancing age, had Frances any taste for the mild distractions and gentle diversions which occupied the more easily diverted and simple-hearted among the exiles, when a gleam of life and hope came back to them in the course of years, in the persons of the princely young pair, the Chevalier de St. George, or James the Third of England and Eighth of Scotland, and his fair, bright sister, who shed a fleeting lustre on the darkening scene. Lady Tyrconnel had lost patience with pretty play, and she had always despised the rural delights which had long chained Count Anthony Hamilton to St. Germain's. She had an equal contempt for his idle literary philandering with Mrs. Henrietta Bulkeley, the young Duchess of Berwick's sister, and the niece of Frances's old acquaintance Frances Stewart, Duchess of Richmond, because nothing more substantial could come of it than tender looks, sentimental sighs and the conning together of silly court lyrics and the more pretentious but equally worthless poem called "*La Fleur d'Epine*," on which, to please Mrs. Henrietta, Anthony wasted so much time that might have been better employed.

It was many a long year since "*La Belle Jennings*" had been guilty of paraphrasing an epistle of Ovid's, and had laughed loudly with her neighbours at the licentious doggerel satires of my Lord Rochester; and Count Anthony, with his elderly gallantry and many accomplishments, was as poor as a church mouse, while Mrs. Henrietta Bulkeley was no richer.

It did not seem to reconcile Frances to such foolish trifles that her former sister and ally, Countess Philibert de Gramont, by this time a wealthy widow, had taken to aiding and abetting so far Anthony in his silliness. She established herself in summer in her country house of Pontolier on the Seine. She provided *fêtes champêtres* for the young scions of the house of Stewart and their court, and entered into their sports with something of the old sparkling Irish gaiety of Elizabeth Hamilton. But frolicsome pilgrimages to shrines and hermitages, merry meals on the green-sward, strawberry or filbert hunting were not at all in Frances

Talbot's way after she was up in years, even though she had still a young daughter to enjoy them. Scarcely less against the grain were the commissions which the pious queen gave her to superintend the decoration of the shrine in the convent of Chaillot, where James's heart was deposited, and where it was already believed to work miracles in answer to the prayers of the faithful votaries admitted to worship before it.

Lady Tyrconnel's treasonable traffic with Marlborough was not confined to letters. She readily got leave of absence from her court duties, and under the plea of travelling and drinking such mineral waters as those of Aix-la-Chapelle for the benefit of her health, she visited Germany, Flanders and Holland, and had opportunities for personal interviews with her brother-in-law, when her wanderings led her near his camp for the time. In reference to one of these meetings the Duke of Marlborough wrote to his duchess that he had waited on her sister and found her looking old, with her hoarseness worse than when he had seen her last, while she was reasonable and kind. Other people who knew her then, described her in still less flattering terms, as very small, very lean, without a trace of her former beauty.

Either during her travels, or while resident at St. Germain, Duchess Frances arranged and concluded the marriage of her daughter, Lady Charlotte Talbot, with Prince Ventimiglia, a Provençal nobleman of Sicilian extraction.

In 1700, in addition to the remnant of the late Irish Viceroy's fortune, which she had brought with her to France, and the three thousand pounds which she had induced King James to award her out of his pension, she succeeded in recovering a portion of her jointure from what had been Lord Tyrconnel's lands of Cabrale in Ireland. From this time she was always complaining vehemently of the non-payment of her rents; and in 1707 or 8, when she was sixty years of age, she ventured back to Ireland on the matter. She is said to have gone by Brussels and Holland direct to Ireland, avoiding England on her way. But on her return journey she is believed to have been in London. It was on this occasion that a remarkable incident in her eventful history is said to have happened.

Madam Thornhurst had come up from Three Elms with her squire for a month's sojourn in town, that the worthy couple might learn what was doing and be able to keep pace with the times. It happened one day that Cherry, in her sedan chair, was passing the New Exchange, when the bright idea struck her that she might alight and visit one of the milliners' stalls in the great mart, so as to have it in her power to carry down into Kent for the benefit of the squire's sisters and nieces the latest fashion in hoods and *négligées*. She had no sooner entered the colonnade when she observed more than one group of buyers and sellers watching a singular figure among the regular traders. This was a little woman

in a white gown and cape, wearing a mask, standing behind a stall and busily offering laces and gloves to the comers and goers.

"Who or what is she?" the country madam inquired with interest of one of the bystanders. "It is an odd guise or disguise for a milliner. Doth she bide here of a constancy? Is she a little mad, think you?"

"Bless you, madam," answered the person addressed, "it do be 'the white widow' or 'the white milliner,' she is called sometimes one, sometimes t'other, and there is a rare pother made about her. No, for sure, she is none of the regular saleswomen, she hath only turned up in that corner for the last three days. Folk say she is bound to be one of the poor Jacobite ladies come up to Lon'on with a petition and fain to keep herself and her young family from starving by selling some fal-lals in this sort, till she can get speech of the Queen or her grace of Marlborough, which comes much to the same thing."

Even while the man spoke some gesture of "the white milliner," some tone of her roughened voice, as she called out briskly and boldly, "Who wants cheap laces fresh from France and Flanders, lawfully come by? None of your smuggled goods here. Come and buy," sent an electric thrill through the chance listener. She saw as in a mirror a young queen of beauty, and of not too fastidious frolic, made up as an orange girl, offering oranges at the door of the Duke's Theatre; the same girl, a little more sedate in a cloak and mask, at the water-gate of Whitehall pretending to hide behind a jutting-out corner of the masonry till the young crew of a wherry lifted a bottle of plague-water from the stairs; still the same girl, woman-grown, removing her mask in Spring Gardens to confront and defy an indignant, outraged man.

While the old well-remembered pictures flashed again before her mind's eye, Cherry herself presented a pleasant picture in her "outing" gown of lavender brocade, with a spotlessly white lawn neckerchief crossed over her motherly bosom, and a grey beaver hat above the frilled cap shading her kind and still comely face. Although she carried a gold-headed stick to support her steps, like most ladies of her years and degree, she advanced nimbly to the stall in the corner. Instinctively she, the most candid of souls, adopted the ruse Lady Tyrconnel had thought fit to employ, for Cherry did not know what danger to the player might not lurk in the exposure of her game.

Madam Thornhurst bent low over the contents of the stall as if to examine the packets of lace and gloves, at the same time she glanced up furtively in the masqued woman's face and addressed to her a whispered appeal. "Cousin Frances, Lady Tyrconnel, what are you doing here? Is it safe, is it fit—oh, pardon me if I appear to blame you—that you should be thus engaged? I am so glad that we are up in town, and that I came by the Exchange this

morning. Will your Grace not let us help and befriend you in some worthier, more becoming manner?"

"Cherry Thornton, by all that's alive," answered her grace in the same subdued voice. "This is a meeting!" Then she spoke aloud, "No, madam, you cannot have the Mechlin on lower terms, but if you will step with me to the back of the stall I think I have some oddments of Valenciennes that may suit you."

Out of sight and hearing of the audience to the encounter, Frances showed herself well pleased and just the least little bit ashamed of being once more caught masquerading, and that in her age.

"I, too, am right down happy that your luck and mine hath brought you to town in this month of May, Cousin Cherry, and I am beholden to you for your proposal of backing me—there spoke the old Cherry, though I misdoubt me that your good man, Peter Thornhurst, would hardly indorse the obliging offer. He and I have not sailed in the same boat this many a day. Don't interrupt me, child; fortunately there is no great need to back me. It is only that I was detained for a couple of weeks in this London, which is more changed than by the great fire we wot of, so changed that I scarce know a public place or a creature. Of the creatures I did know who are left, nineteen out of twenty would not acknowledge my claim to their acquaintance supposing I jogged their memory. And here was I with a piece of business which these rogues of lawyers would not get through in a trice, as they might have done. I was spending money, while my rascals of tenants in Ireland are always behindhand with their rents. Methought, Cherry, I should clear my expenses, and it would serve to pass the time, if I borrowed, for the nonce, a plan some of the poor Scotch and Irish ladies have brought into vogue, since we were all ruined at the Boyne. But my plaguy business is finished and I am about to start for France. This is positively my last day on 'Change," explained Frances with a lingering twinkle in her eyes, "only I am going down to Holywell for a couple of days. I have an invitation from my worshipful brother-in-law, as if I should have needed an invitation to that quarter! He ain't at home, he's at the wars as usual, as you will see if you read the news-prints. My old mother and my high and mighty sister Sarah, who is mistress of the fine new house I am going down to Hertfordshire to see, are both from home likewise, which, taking all things into consideration, may make the visit peacefuller and pleasanter. But I'll tell you what, Cherry, I should be all the better for your company, if you'll give it me—you and I never disagreed, and I've a notion I'll be so lonesome all by myself, that I'll see ghosts at every step, though, as I told you, they've pulled down the old Holywell, my father's cramped, crammed house among the farm-offices and the gooseberry bushes, and built a grand mansion. What my lord and my lady, who have court quarters and their



own palace at Blenheim, want with another mansion it beats me to guess. Yes, come with me, Cherry. Tell Cousin Peter I'll get you into no scrape. I'll not undermine your principles, political or moral. I'll just keep you a couple of days with me—he need not grudge me that much of your company when all my children, even little Charley, are gone from me. Children, quoth I? Two of them, my Lady Dillon and my Lady Kingsland, are no children of mine, they are no better than adders I had the misfortune to foster in my bosom. But we'll say no more about them, it only angers me; any way I'll send you back to your good man safe and sound."

Not Cherry, not even Peter Thornhurst, though he grumbled loudly at the imposition, could refuse the request, so Cherry went down once more to Holywell with her Cousin Frances instead of her Aunt Hill on this occasion.

It was the first time Frances had revisited the place where she was born since she had quitted it, a light-hearted, ambitious girl, proud to start in the world as one of the maids-of-honour to the Duchess of York. It was not as the "white widow" or the "white milliner" that Frances reappeared in Hertfordshire. She presented herself with all the state and dignity of her Grace of Tyrconnel, who, although she had secured but a fraction of the immense wealth of her Grace of Marlborough, was still, in spite of misadventures, in possession of considerable funds, which she husbanded warily and spent discreetly.

The orders for his sister-in-law's honourable reception, forwarded by the Duke of Marlborough, caused Frances and Cherry to be received with every mark of respect by his Grace's servants in the new, spacious and costly house, at which one of the visitors was for ever sneering.

Frances was a little more subdued when she stood in the grand old abbey by her sister Bab's grave, and read the long inscription recording the domestic virtues of her who lay beneath, which Colonel Griffith, her husband, had caused to be engraven on the stone.

"Poor, docile, dutiful Bab! Nobody will ever write as much of me. Nobody will call me a pattern of wifely obedience and good housewifery," muttered Frances a little ruefully. "And yet do you know, Cherry," she added, recovering her spirit in a moment, "I had two men, neither of whom would ever have dreamt of saying me nay. I am not sure whether you can vouch as much for your one man."

Cherry shook her head, but she smiled a smile of perfect faith and content. She thought if she died, her Peter, though he was never anything else than lord and master in his own house of Three Elms, and said her nay half-a-dozen times in the day when he was in the humour—generally repenting the contradiction five minutes afterwards, would have just such a chronicle made of her



merits—vastly exaggerating them in his reverent love and sorrow. She could imagine him taking their son—they had one boy—on a quiet Sunday afternoon, to stand before the tablet on the church wall, or at the head of the mossy mound in the churchyard, and telling him what a good woman his mother had been, and how he, her husband, though he was bound to get along somehow, had yet been lost without her, since God had taken her from him, ending always with the emphatic injunction: “Lad, an’ you mind me and my words, and are worth aught—as you should be, seeing that you are her son as well as mine—never forget your mother.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE END OF ALL.

CHANGES still followed changes in Frances’s declining years; many of them buffets of fortune affecting her more or less to the last. In 1710 occurred the great quarrel between Queen Anne and sister Sarah, which no efforts, however importunate on the offender’s part, ever patched up. A new force was at work; a new power in the ascendancy. Cousin Abigail Hill, who had owed her early promotion to the imperious duchess, had slyly ousted her patroness, and first as Mrs., and then as Lady Masham, the wife of one of the royal pages, with Harley, Bolingbroke and all the Tories at her back, was now ruling her plastic yet *dour* mistress, and practically reigning at Kensington and St. James’s, in the room of “Mrs. Freeman” superseded.

Frances might have rejoiced in the ascendancy of the Tories, but with the eclipse of sister Sarah and her great captain, the principal source of Lady Tyrconnel’s influence at the exiled court and of the favours she received from the queen “over the water,” came to an end. In 1712, the Duke of Marlborough, who had assumed much of the state of royalty, eating his meals alone, while the gentlemen of his staff stood behind his chair, was dismissed from his office and impeached in Parliament for needlessly prolonging the war in Germany and the Low Countries to serve his own purposes and for trafficking in the sale of army commissions in order to increase his enormous wealth. But, disgraced as he was, the damning evidence of his treasonable correspondence with the court of St. Germans, which would have cost him his head, and might have compromised Lady Tyrconnel among others, was withheld and suffered to fall to the ground.

The same year the poor, blooming, gay Princess Louisa, born and bred in the shade of exile, fell a victim to small-pox, which had been frequently fatal to members of her race, from which her brother, the Chevalier de St. George, narrowly escaped with his life. Shortly afterwards the Chevalier was politely requested, as one

of the chief bones of contention between the two countries of England and France, to retire to one of the boundaries of the latter kingdom. France was absolutely drained and exhausted by the long wars, while all the glorious feats of Turenne and Condé, the generals of Louis's youth, were likely to be forgotten under the humiliation inflicted on the Gallic nation by the magnificent generalship of the faithless Marlborough. Even the vain and selfish old king, who had shed so much blood for the exaltation of himself and France, with his wrinkles unsoftened by the black perriwig which concealed his grey hair, was fain to cry, "Hold, enough!" and to think on terms of truce with Europe. Accordingly one of the conditions of the Peace of Utrecht, in 1714, was the formal abandonment on Louis's part of the support which he had hitherto lent to the son of his old friend and ally, James II., and Louis's acknowledgment of the Elector of Hanover, who, on the death of the reigning sovereign, was immediately received and accepted by the bulk of the English people, as George I., the lawful successor to Queen Anne.

That reluctant declaration of King Louis was the death-blow to the Jacobite cause, and "the Rebellion of the Fifteen," which followed in Scotland and England the year after, was but a desperate effort, fore-doomed.

The shadows were indeed closing in thick and fast, till they approached the darkness of night, round the hapless colony at St. Germain, of which heart-broken Mary of Modena, struggling under the pangs of a mortal disease, was still permitted to be the centre.

Duchess Frances was never the woman to stick to a perishing cause or to abide with a handful of faithful, if squabbling, old servants by their dying mistress, who had been destined to live thirty years—half of her life—in exile. It could scarcely be said to hurry Lady Tyrconnel's parting footsteps, though it made two weakened ties the less to St. Germain, that both the Hamiltons were gone before her. Elizabeth, Comtesse de Gramont, was dead and her attached brother, Count Anthony, old and poor, had withdrawn from his chosen refuge, the scene of his literary flights and mild flirtation with Mrs. Henrietta Bulkeley. He had settled at Poussé, to be under the wing of his niece, the abbess there. He was still equal to an inspiring consolation granted to him. Through a second niece, Lady Stafford, who was another daughter of the late Comtesse de Gramont, he was enabled to maintain an interesting correspondence with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Frances withdrew from all that remained of the banished court. She quitted the country of her adoption, in which she had dwelt for so many years; she came back to the native country of both her husbands—Ireland of all places—and established herself in Dublin, where she had reigned as the wife of the Lord-Deputy. If a few of her old friends and satellites survived to welcome her; if Ire-

land was still Jacobite and Roman Catholic at heart, the Jacobites and Roman Catholics were no longer the dominant party. But the fearlessness which brought Frances back to the country in which her name had been proscribed, was not without its warrant. She was secure in the amnesty which the wise clemency of the heavy German Georges and their shrewd ministers granted to the earlier offenders in the Stuart cause, and the oblivion into which their offences were suffered speedily to fall.

To do Lady Tyrconnel justice, she does not seem to have provoked hostility in her age. She accepted her position on sufferance, and settled herself quietly on the sufficient means she could command for a private gentlewoman's establishment, in her own house in Paradise Row, on Arbour Hill, near the Phoenix Park; she does not even seem to have had the least share, under the rose, in those practical insults to the statue of King William on College Green which, during whole decades, afforded a safety valve for the stored wrath of the native Irish against their Orange step-brethren.

Duchess Sarah, out of her huge abundance, was ransacking Belgium for pictures by her favourite painter Rubens, with which to decorate the walls of her palace of Blenheim, where the great duke was ending his days in senile imbecility. She was declining to die when her doctor told her, and storming like the untamed virago she was over all who had the misfortune to be connected with her, or to come near her. Duchess Frances, out of her comparative poverty, was founding a convent of Poor Clares in Dublin, and including in her will, under the plea of tendering them her forgiveness, a lively vituperation of the two daughters who had offended her, and a special bequest of her house and furniture to pay some veritable debts of honour of Dick Talbot's, which had never been discharged and lay heavily on his aged widow's conscience.

Cherry, an aged woman in her turn, was still living with her old squire at Three Elms. He was Sir Peter now, for he had been high sheriff of his county, when he was knighted, and later on he had received a baronetcy as a sturdy pillar of the Whig and Protestant succession. Lady Thornhurst had not forgotten the cousin Frances of her youth, and having had some reason to fear that she might be desolate and neglected in her great age and reverses, her kinswoman made a special request to her husband to allow the young squire, a fine honest fellow who had just completed his education by making the grand tour, to finish the tour by going on an expedition to Ireland. Dublin was now about as accessible by Holyhead as any other part of his Majesty's dominions, and Cherry's son would do what he could to comfort and cheer his mother's old friend.

Sir Peter protested a good deal to begin with at what he considered a waste of means and a waste of time, an uncalled for demonstration altogether, but he gave his consent at last. He

even added to it the amendment that he, too, owed something to his cousin Hamilton of former days, for if she had ever wronged him, it was also true that he was indebted to her for what had been the greatest blessing of his life. At these words, spoken half-gruffly, half-bashfully, a pair of sweet dim old eyes had sparkled for a moment as when in their first youth, and a thin ivory hand had caught up the squire's wrinkled brown hand, and with a pretty half-French gesture, kissed it before he could indignantly prevent the action.

The young squire, nothing loth to prolong his adventures, while he was manly enough and kind-hearted enough to be tender to a woman, whether she were young or old, was on his way to comfort and gladden his mother's friend. In the convent of Poor Clares meek and devoted nuns were praying day and night for their benefactress, when the end came suddenly.

On a bitter winter's night, in 1730, an old woman of eighty-one fell from her bed to the floor of her room, and being too feeble to raise herself or to call for help, was found in the morning perishing with cold, and fast dying. It was a piteous close to a life which had begun with joyous ardour and risen to heights of gratified ambition.

Yet Frances Talbot was not entirely forsaken. The Poor Clares were crying out for the forgiveness of her sins, and calling down blessings on her hoary head. Away in England her old friend Cherry was thinking lovingly of her. Cherry's husband had cancelled his debt against her and was not only wishing her well, he was thanking her for the peaceful fruit of her rashness and folly. If Frances had but known it, Cherry's son was travelling post-haste to look after her and solace her, though he arrived only in time to stand sorrowfully by her open grave.

Frances, Duchess of Tyrconnel, was buried in St. Patrick's Cathedral, where no stone was raised in her honour, but a tablet to her memory was inserted in the wall of the Scottish College, Paris, and an ever-burning lamp was kept before it for fully a hundred years, when the college itself ceased to exist. Duchess Frances survived her first husband, Count George Hamilton, fifty-four years; her second husband, Dick Talbot, thirty-nine years; her eldest daughter, Lady Ross, with whom she seems to have been on friendly terms, six years, and her brother-in-law, the Duke of Marlborough, eight years. Duchess Sarah, on the contrary, survived her sister Frances fourteen years, remaining unsubdued to the last, and dying as late as 1744.

## THE TOP OF HER BENT.

By FAYR MADOC,

AUTHOR OF "THEREBY," "MARGARET JERMIN," ETC.

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ONCE upon a time there was a Princess who believed so ardently in the supernatural, that at last she thought and talked of nothing else, and occupied herself solely in discussing dreams and spiritual manifestations, and she surrounded herself with people only who had seen visions and whose strange dreams had (or had not) come true, and who had received spiritual manifestations and seen apparitions—or at least whose second cousins and great aunts had witnessed the extraordinary.

Now the Princess dwelt in a palace which had once been a place of luxury and delight, where people could move about fearlessly during all the twenty-four hours of every day and night. But now that this Princess reigned in it, it was haunted by spirits, and, go where one might, some intangible presence or some eerie appearance filled every nook and corner of it. One day the Lord Chamberlain met a Shadowy Lady in Blue on the staircase, who seemed to gaze at him out of eyeless sockets. The Lord Chamberlain did not fail to relate his adventure, and the next day the first Maid of Honour encountered the same lady in the picture-gallery. Then she was seen by the Chief Page; then by the Mistress of the Robes. Soon she had been seen by the whole household, including the Princess herself, and thenceforth the Eyeless Blue Lady became a denizen of the palace and walked there as freely as its royal mistress. Next, a phantom coach was heard at midnight to drive up to the palace portals and a phantom hand rang furiously at the great bell. No eye saw this vision. The curiosity of those who peeped remained ungratified. But the sounds were heard by many, and those who heard shuddered and clung to each other in dismay.

Soon, unusual things happened in the palace with regularity and frequency. Nightly, a cold and terrible hand was laid upon the cheek of the Lord Chief Justice after he had extinguished his light. Nightly also, a rustling silk gown passed through the chamber of the Generalissimo of the Army. On Sundays, at two in the early morning, a hysterical laugh was laughed at the bedside of the Princess herself, and at an hour before cock-crow every month when the moon began to wane, feet scuffled, a heavy body fell, and

a deep and dreadful groan was uttered in the apartment of the Poet Laureate. An intangible monk seemed to inhabit the library; an invisible but bloody presence was felt to pervade the ball-room. Men shunned the smoking-room at the going down of the sun, because at that hour the apartment was permeated by the faint and exquisite aroma of a tobacco no mortal had ever inhaled. The grand piano in the drawing-room was constantly played upon, and when the Princess and her suite entered in haste—although but that instant the room had been ringing with melody—the piano would be found closed and the apartment void. Children scampered up and down the wide staircases, when there were no children within a mile of the palace. Dogs whined at closed doors, and lo! when one arose to admit the creature, no dog was to be found. In short, there was no end to the extraordinary occurrences which took place in the Princess's palace daily. The Princess grew thin and haggard, and her large and luminous eyes looked as if they would fall out of her head. And her whole court grew meagre and pallid also, and none spoke above his breath, and the women clustered together in twos and threes, and when any one entered a room, the occupants would ask at once, "What have you seen? What have you experienced? What did you dream last night?"

Then some who had formerly held high offices at the court, but who had been displaced because they were incredulous of the Princess's second sight, and because they had declared that he only who desired to see ghosts saw them, for that ghosts *per se* existed not, drew together in consultation and agreed that something must be done.

"Let us prevail upon the Princess to marry. Marriage is a healthy state," said one.

This proposition was received with unanimity, and an audience of the Princess being obtained, two gentlemen, who had once been respectively Prime Minister and Chief Court Physician, were admitted into Her Royal Highness's august presence. They found their royal mistress—who was herself as slender as a lily and very wan—surrounded by her maids of honour, lean and terrified damsels, and by her ministers of state—cadaverous and melancholy personages. The whole assembly looked as if it were smitten by some painful nervous sickness; each one glanced hither and thither, as though devoured by some dread expectancy—all started at every sound, and their breasts heaved with inexplicable emotions and their bony hands were clenched convulsively.

For very pity the ex-Chief Physician could have wept. But he restrained himself, while the ex-Prime Minister explained his errand, begging respectfully to inform the Princess that, while she was striving to grasp the Supernatural, the Natural was falling into decay—that the Army and Navy were becoming disorganized,

foreign powers were growing aggressive, literature was neglected and art and science forgotten, social evils went unremedied, and the whole realm was becoming disaffected.

Then the Princess said, sighing, "What would you have me do?"

Then the ex-Prime Minister replied with caution, "Madam, we would have your Royal Highness bend your mind from the Immaterial to the Material. To one so widely read as your Royal Highness we need not to quote the wise man's words: *Our business is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct.*"

"But how can we tell what truths may not be revealed to us through spiritual investigation?" said the Princess.

"Madam, truth will reveal itself in its own good time," rejoined the ex-Prime Minister.

"Not so," said the Princess. "Does not the pearl remain hid until the diver plunges into the sea? I have deeply explored spiritual phenomena, and there have been vouchsafed to me visions so translucent that they were indiscernible to any but the most highly spiritualized, and many other wondrous experiences have been accorded to me, the serviceableness of which will doubtless be revealed in days to——"

"Madam," interrupted the ex-Chief Physician, "does not your Royal Highness know that the senses respond to impressions from within as well as to impressions from without?"

"Sir, what mean you by that?" inquired the Princess, frowning.

"Madam," said the ex-Chief Physician, boldly, "I mean that in the brain messages may be transmitted from the ideational centres to the sensory ganglia, and that these messages from within produce a similar effect to the impressions caused by external stimuli: hence, at the suggestion of the ideational centres, sights may be seen and sounds heard, nay, even tastes, odours and tactual impressions perceived which are not objective at all, but purely imaginary."

"Do you mean, sir," cried the Princess, "that you think I *invent* the spiritual manifestations in which I rejoice?"

"That which your Royal Highness so aptly suggests is what your Royal Highness's humble servant is fain to think," said the ex-Chief Physician with a low bow.

"If my chief executioner were not confined to his bed, and very ill from the effects of an awful vision which was given to him last night, in which he saw all the executioners of all time waging war against all the executed, and the executed, forming a mighty army, with their heads beneath their arms, subduing them, I would have you beheaded," said the Princess.

The ex-Chief Physician bowed again, and the ex-Prime Minister hastened to say that, putting aside all explanations that might be offered as to the objectivity or subjectivity of spiritual manifestations, he would come to the point by declaring that he and all the



rest of her Royal Highness's faithful subjects earnestly desired that the Princess might show herself more gracious towards them, and to this end, trusting that the indulgence of pure and healthy domestic joys would render her more mindful of the mundane needs of her people, they humbly entreated their royal mistress to enter forthwith into the holy bonds of wedlock.

At this the Princess blushed, for she was but a woman, notwithstanding her predilection for the Supernatural.

"But I do not wish to marry," she said.

"Nevertheless, we venture to implore your Royal Highness to reconsider the matter," said the ex-Prime Minister.

"But whom should I marry? Whom *could* I marry?" said the Princess.

"Madam," began the ex-Prime Minister, "there is the Prince of——"

But the Princess cut him short.

"A Prince is nought to me," she said. "What have I in common with ordinary mortals who have no cognizance of the spirit-world, who are too gross and carnal to discern the invisible or to apprehend the impalpable, and whose organizations are too coarse to receive incorporeal manifestations? Nay, my lord, if you would have me wed, you must find for me a husband so completely *en rapport* with the spirit world that he shall pass through the Crucial Test, wherewith I shall try him, and retain not only my esteem and confidence but my adoring reverence."

At these words, the ex-Prime Minister and the ex-Chief Physician drooped their heads dejectedly, while a faint murmur of applause arose from the thin lips of the courtiers. But a Child, who was seated on a stool at the Princess's knee, the orphan son of her dearest friend, asked, "Godmother, what is the Test?"

All listened for the answer. But the Princess was moody and would not explain.

"When the time comes you will know," she said.

Then the two ex-officers retired, sad and desponding, and the Princess withdrew into a dim chamber, where daily at that hour was heard the music of unseen violins, played high in the air by phantom fiddlers.

The ex-Ministers rubbed their heads and thought. What was this Crucial Test wherewith the Princess should try her would-be husband? And who would be found to submit himself to the ordeal? The two good gentlemen were sorely perplexed. But a rich princess need not remain single long, and, as in the legends of fairyland, suitors quickly presented themselves, each one confident that the Test—however hard it might be—was no harder a nut than he could conveniently crack.

Upon each suitor who was brought before her, the Princess turned her eyes languidly.

"What is your title to seek my hand?" she said then.

And one offered her a pack of cards and bade her name the card that should spring from among its fellows. And another produced lighted Chinese lanterns out of the Lord High Chamberlain's hat. And another caused his limbs to be tied with cords in many knots and had himself shut up within a small space with a cigarette paper laid upon his knees, and lo, in a moment the curtain was withdrawn and the cigarette was rolled and between the lips of him who still sat there bound with knotted cords. But the princess only smiled and said, "That is mere sleight of hand and any juggler can do as much."

Then others came, relating how in the stillest hours of night in locked chambers, friends who were at a great distance appeared to them, and how they had learnt afterwards that at that moment the friend had died, and telling of warning voices which had kept them from starting on some fateful journey and of prophetic dreams which had been realized, and of strange coincidences and marvellous presentiments and eccentric exhibitions of psychic phenomena. But the Princess still smiled and said, "These are only the normal displays of spiritual force and the lowest servants in my scullery have had manifestations as marked and as unusual."

And some of the suitors went away crestfallen. But some pleaded to be allowed to undergo the Test, and to these the Princess said, "Tell me of what I am thinking. This is not the Test, but if you can tell me that, you will have accomplished something."

Then each strove to read the royal lady's thought and one guessed one thing and one another. But none could divine, for the Princess was always thinking that each of her suitors was more tedious and unacceptable than the one that came before.

At last there arrived a young and handsome Professor of Mental Physiology.

"Madam," said he, "there is no need that I should try your patience by exhibiting tricks of legerdemain. All juggleries can I perform. But they are nothing to me, since I can set the Thames on fire, draw blood from a stone, run the gauntlet of criticism, pick a quarrel, nurse revenge, put a rod in pickle, break my mother's heart, teach my grandmother to suck eggs, catch a weazel asleep, get out of bed on the wrong side, raise the wind, play with fire, kill two birds with one stone, keep myself close, laugh on the wrong side of my mouth, save my breath to cool my porridge, keep a secret, steal a kiss, hug the shore, hatch a plot, drive a bargain, swallow an indignity, make a mountain out of a molehill, reduce an argument to an absurdity, double my pace, make money fly, find a verdict, preserve my temper, mince matters, create confusion, magnify my own importance, rivet your attention, take the bull by the horns, and lose myself in a crowd.

I can also play upon the imagination and fool a woman to the top of her bent. Madam, your Royal Highness doubtless perceives that my relations with the unseen powers are extraordinary. May it be that to your Royal Highness's most humble servant shall be vouchsafed to pass the Crucial Test, which shall be the key to so great ecstasies!"

Then the Princess regarded him with favour, and she said, "Sir, how did you obtain this *recueillement* with the Supernatural?"

And the Professor made answer, "Madam, I have obtained it by the most careful and incessant cultivation of a certain part of the brain, within which lies the power of being in touch with the unapproached and the unapproachable. In most human brains these supra-normal ganglia are merely rudimentary, and to few is it given so to develop these higher convolutions that their mystic powers are declared. But before these few are spread the marvellous mysteries of the other world, of which grosser creatures know nought, and which they—in their ignorant and undeveloped state—deride."

"Professor," said the Princess, earnestly, "how can I attain this supra-normal development?"

"Madam," said the Professor, "by perpetually dwelling upon the supra-normal idea, the supra-normal nerves are set in motion and the supra-normal groove becomes fixed, and presently the supra-normal ganglia dominate the whole existence. The rest of the mind may be dormant. The senses may be dulled and the intellect atrophied. But the supra-normal groove will deepen and the supra-normal nerves will work with more and more activity, till the Highest State shall be achieved—even constant communion with the unperceived and the imperceptible. But if I mistake not Madam, your Royal Highness has already reached this Ultimate State."

"I have thought of the Supernatural and of nothing else for many years," said the Princess.

"And you have perceived?" said he, tentatively.

"Many wonderful things have been manifested to me," said she. "Only this morning the Idea of a Strangled Abbot accompanied me from the moment of waking until noon. I did not see it, neither did I hear its last gurgling breath, nor yet did I feel it. But it was given to me to apprehend that it was there by a subtle and indescribable sense, which is vague and mystic, and yet sharp and powerful as a Damascene blade."

"The Supra-normal is ever wonderful," murmured the Professor.

"Yet there are some who call my delicate perceptions abnormal, who attribute my visions to a diseased and morbid fancy, who impress upon me the manifestations I have received are entirely subjective," said the Princess.

"Those are the coarse and grovelling natures which cannot soar to the cultivation of the supra-normal faculties," said the Professor

with warmth. "The supra-normal faculties of such are more rudimentary than those of the brutes, for even dogs bark at we know not what, and howl dismally when death draws near."

"Then you do not think that my delight in spiritual communion evidences an unsound mind?" said the Princess.

"A thousand times, no!" cried the Professor, with much energy. "I believe that it indicates the evolution of a sixth sense, which shall substantiate the fourth dimension, discover the chemical properties of spirit, and beside which the functions of the normal senses and the action of the normal brain shall seem like sight and hearing and intelligence in a month-old babe. To your Royal Highness is it permitted to be one of the pioneers of this new, splendid and unimaginable development."

The Princess would have indefinitely prolonged this conversation, for even to a lady whose supra-normal faculties are acute it is not altogether disagreeable to be *en rapport* with a handsome young man. But at this juncture the Prime Minister came forward and begged respectfully to inquire whether the Princess would graciously deign to inform him if she intended to apply the Crucial Test to the last arrived suitor.

Then the Princess, turning her large and speaking eyes upon the Professor, said, "Tell me of what I am thinking. This is not the Test, but if you can tell that, you will have accomplished something."

"Madam," said the Professor bold, "it becomes not me to read your Royal Highness's thoughts aloud. But should an oracle reply to your Royal Highness's command, would it not say, '*Sweet is the rapture of mutual understanding and the lasting companionship of equal minds is beyond praise?*'"

Then the Princess's pale cheek flushed red, for she had indeed been thinking that if she could bestow her hand upon any, it would be upon this handsome and sympathetic professor, whose mind seemed to be a counterpart of her own. So she said with confusion, "That will pass, Professor. My thoughts were possibly of some seductive theme."

"Then may I hope that your Royal Highness will impart to me what is the Crucial Test?" said he.

"It is a hard thing," returned she, sighing, for she was reluctant to risk losing the Professor's society.

"Nevertheless, I will overcome it," said he.

Then the Princess groaned within herself, not daring to believe that the Professor should succeed. But at last she said, "Professor, if upon a certain day, in my sight and in the sight of all my court, you, by your own volition, be snatched away wholly and taken utterly out of our fleshly cognizance; and if, returning to us, you be etherealized as no mortal man has ever been, and if you have had discernments such as no human senses have ever opened unto, then shall I know that your relations with the Super-

natural are absolute, and then shall I trust in you completely and adore you with the utmost reverence. This is the Test."

Then all gazed at the Professor expecting that he should be daunted. But he said, "Madam, be it as your Royal Highness desires. In eight days will I be ready to undergo the Test, and then will I—in your Royal Highness's sight, and in the sight of all the court—vanish wholly from your fleshly cognizance; and returning after a space, I will be fair and spiritualized beyond thought, and my knowledge shall transcend all human discrimination. Now retire we all and let us spend our days fasting and in contemplation, so that our grosser parts may be deadened and our supra-normal faculties intensified to the uttermost. And beware, Madam, lest by the indulgence of the smallest normal thought your Royal Highness's supra-normal faculties be but for an instant diminished, for if your Royal Highness's supra-normal faculties should abate their keenness and their expectancy only for the twinkling of an eye, it is most sure that some portion of the mystic drama will escape your Royal Highness's apprehension, and in this case, should the veil of the universe be rent asunder and the spirit-chorus come to meet you, your Royal Highness would be deaf and blind to these inconceivable glories. And I, Madam," he added, in a voice audible to the Princess alone, "I should be cruelly disappointed. For I think that your Royal Highness has developed a mental possibility and a cerebral convolution hitherto unknown among men, and if I find that I am mistaken, if I be compelled to own that your Royal Highness's faculties are but normal and undeveloped—truly, Madam, if I find this to be so, my fate will be indeed bitter, and I shall be of all men the most wretched. I shall have passed through the Crucial Test and I shall be etherealized beyond compare. But if my royal mistress stand without, of what avail will it be that my supra-normal powers are unimpeachable? For without you, Madam, your Royal Highness's faithful servant ceases to exist."

Then all withdrew, and upon the eighth day, when the sun was low, the court was reassembled, and the Professor stood in the midst, clothed in a strange garment, whose texture might not be discovered nor its hues named, and an ineffable smile was upon his lips. And the courtiers were lean and pale and heavy-eyed, for they had fasted greatly and endured much contemplation, and the pallor and emaciation of the Princess was more than all of theirs. But the Princess's godson was comely and well nourished.

Then the Professor, standing in the sight of the Princess and of all the court, raised his hands and cried with a loud voice, and immediately they saw him not, neither did their eyes behold him during the time that one might have counted two score. Then a voice said, "Welcome me, O my Princess!" and again they saw the Professor standing in their midst. And he said, "Madam, did I not see that time hath laid no hand upon your Royal Highness's

countenance, I should say that my absence had endured for centuries. For that which no human language can utter has been revealed to me, and the unspeakable and indescribable has been shown to me, and the knowledge of the Supernatural has transfused me and etherealized me as no mortal man hath ever been heretofore; and this your Royal Highness's intensified supra-normal faculties can well perceive."

And the Princess gave her hand to the Professor, and promised to rely upon him for evermore and to adore him with reverence.

But the Princess's godson said, "The Professor never disappeared at all. He stood there the whole time, and I saw him snap his fingers and wink."

Then the Professor said mildly, "Doubtless, my child, you thought you saw me standing there. But you looked with the eyes of your body, and so brief was my absence that it seemed to you I had never gone—as, when you spin a top with a red spot, so rapid is the movement of the top that the red spot seems ever in sight."

And the Professor took the Princess's hand and led her away to the banqueting-hall, and the next day the nuptials were celebrated with great pomp, and the Professor ruled the Princess and her dominions from that time, and there was prosperity in that land.

But the Princess caused her godson to be whipped, and commanded that he should be sent to a Haunted School.

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## "SHEBA."

### A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By "RITA,"

AUTHOR OF "DAME DURDEN," "DARBY AND JOAN," "THE LADY NANCY,"  
"GRETCHEN," ETC., ETC.

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### SHEBA RECEIVES AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

IF Sheba had not been so much absorbed in these new ideas, and so much occupied in thinking out a plan for the book she had made up her mind to write, she might have observed a difference in the way she was treated at home—a certain curiosity and deference in her stepfather's manner, and tolerance and friendly complacency in that of her mother; but she did not notice the change, only she wondered sometimes that Maxime de Pharamond was so constant a visitor. He dined at least three times a week with the Levisons; but as he generally devoted himself to Bessie Saxton, Sheba put her down as the attraction.

One evening Hex put in an appearance, and Sheba received him with a little trepidation, remembering how irate he had been at the teaching episode. He had altered very much. He was taller now than Sheba herself, and had all the airs and conceits of young manhood, and many of its incipient vices.

He treated his sister with a good-humoured condescension—told her she wasn't half bad-looking, but *dowdy*, and that she was a fool to work when she might live at her ease in luxury. More than this he had been forbidden to say. He remained at home a week, spending half his days in bed reading novels—the other half playing billiards with Pharamond, who had struck up a great friendship with him, or lounging about the Sydney streets with a cigar in his mouth.

I have said before that the Levisons only moved in very second-rate society, despite their wealth, and Mrs. Levison had never yet had the honour of an invitation to Government House. However, this desire of her heart seemed now possible of achievement, owing to Pharamond's interest. She had manœuvred for it very skilfully, so she imagined, and with no idea that the astute Frenchman saw what she was angling for.



One day the longed-for missive arrived, and "Mr. and Mrs. Levison and Miss Ormatroyd" were invited to one of those "omnium gatherum" receptions that were more of a condescension than a compliment.

But Mrs. Levison was perfectly radiant, and when the count dropped in about five o'clock that same afternoon, she received him with a welcome almost rapturous.

He thought it was now time to open fire, and without much preamble explained to Mrs. Levison that it was customary in his country to ask the parents of a *demoiselle* for permission to marry her. He told her he was rich, and had large estates in the south of France, so that the question of *dot* was not important, though no doubt the rich Mr. Levison would not let his stepdaughter come portionless to her husband. But the truth was, he loved Madlle. Ormatroyd—had loved her from the first—and now asked permission to address her, having explained, as in honour bound, his intentions.

Mrs. Levison grew quite pale with emotion.

"Really," she said, "my dear count, you honour me. Any mother could have but one reply to your generous proposal. I shall be too delighted to receive you here as a suitor for my daughter's hand; but she—I fear she is so young, so indifferent to marriage. You must not be in too great a hurry to speak to her."

The count smiled—a little oddly.

"Perhaps," he said, "you, madame, would speak, and prepare her a little. I know how timid they are, these *ingénues*, but no husband objects to innocence—at first."

"Certainly, I will speak," said Mrs. Levison, colouring a little as she met those bold smiling eyes. "I am sure she will be deeply sensible of the honour you do her. It seems surprising that you should have chosen her for a wife when you must have seen so many beautiful women in London and Paris."

"True," he said; "but the women of society are too alike to please me, in beauty, as in morals. Now, your daughter—she is fresh, original, clever; she will be beautiful too—ah, that without doubt; and there is about her an air—proud, wild, untamable—a something altogether different from the ordinary *demoiselle*."

"Good heavens!" thought Mrs. Levison; "what can the men see in Sheba? There was Noel Hill, and now Count Pharamond. To me she has always appeared so stupid, and ugly, and uninteresting."

Aloud she said, "Ah! you are a lover, count, so one must excuse flattery; but indeed you have made me most happy. My sweet child," she added with emotion; "what a bright future lies before her."

To assert this, Mrs. Levison's nature must have been singularly

trustful, considering that she knew nothing at all of Pharamond's antecedents or character. Her husband had made his acquaintance merely through a business transaction, and for the rest they had but his own word. He might have been an adventurer, a criminal—anything; yet she was prepared to fling her innocent young daughter into his arms without a question as to her own feelings on the subject.

One hears a great deal about the beauty and unselfishness of maternity, but observation and experience lead me to say that maternity with marriageable daughters seldom presents a noble or self-denying aspect. The fact of an eligible suitor is invariably hailed with alacrity—eligible, of course, applying to worldly goods and such unimportant details as position, or social dignity. The *moral* character is rarely passed under such microscopic scrutiny as the eligible! Wealth hides a multitude of sins to the eyes of a prospective mother-in-law. Yet the world is full of the cant of the *holiness* of maternity.

There are plenty of women who pose to their offspring as the most martyred and unselfish of beings, simply because the office of maternity has involved a little pain, a little anxiety and an amount of self-denial that is very often obligatory.

If a woman marries she must undertake the drawbacks of the conjugal state, as well as its triumphs, pleasures or advantages. If children are part and parcel of her new condition, she is only obeying a law of nature, and her doing so has nothing meritorious about it.

When the moral relationship steps in and the duties of child and parent begin to assume a definite shape, then it is time enough to talk of unselfishness; and then, too, we find how few have really stood the crucial test.

When Count Pharamond had bowed himself out that afternoon, Mrs. Levison remained for a long time seated in the drawing-room, taking counsel with herself as to how she would break the news to Sheba. She was a little bit afraid that the girl would not be as elated as she herself felt. True, of late she had been much more amiable, and indeed had seemed to like Pharamond's society; but then, as Mrs. Levison finished with a sigh, one never *could* count on Sheba—never know what whim or fancy would seize her.

In the midst of her reflections the door opened and her daughter entered. Mrs. Levison looked up.

"Is that you, my dear?" she said, with that needless questioning of what is self-evident that helps modern conversation so largely.

"Yes," said Sheba, coming into the half-dusk of the big splendid room; "you are alone—what a wonder."

"I have had a visitor," said her mother urbanely; "but he has just left. It was your devoted admirer, Count Pharamond."

"My—devoted admirer!" echoed Sheba, as she flung aside her hat and gloves. "Since when? I thought he was Bessie's."

"You were mistaken, then," said Mrs. Levison with unconcealed triumph, fancying that she had detected an encouraging jealousy in the girl's remark. "It is you whom he admires, and he has done so from the first."

Sheba laughed carelessly. "He does me honour," she said; "I can't say, however, that I appreciate his admiration—or return it."

"Now," thought Mrs. Levison, "there she begins. It is really surprising how that girl manages to aggravate me, even when I am in the best of tempers." She tried to control herself. She felt that this was a case in which diplomacy would count for more than compulsion. She resolved to be diplomatic. "My dear child," she said blandly, "you are the most innocent and unworldly of creatures. I know that, but you are quite old enough to get a little worldly knowledge into your head—clever as it may be. Some day, I suppose, you will do as all women do—when they get the chance—marry. Still, it doesn't do for a girl to wait too long, or to be too particular, and really in a country like this I am sure eligible husbands are most difficult to find. Therefore, I must tell you that a great honour has been paid me to-day, and to you, through me. I have, in fact, received an offer of marriage for you from Count de Pharamond."

"Mother!" gasped Sheba, stepping back a pace and turning white as death.

"No doubt you are astonished," persisted Mrs. Levison. "It is really quite incredible what he could have seen in you—a man who might have married into the best society in Europe, and then to choose a little unfashionable colonial. However, there is no accounting for men's tastes. He has done everything quite *en règle*—quite as it is done in the best French society. He came to me and laid his proposals before me, wishing to know whether I approved his suit in the first instance."

"And what did you say?" asked Sheba, recovering from her first astonishment, and feeling now rather amused than otherwise at her mother's complacent manner.

"Say? What could I say? What would any right-feeling Christian mother say who had her child's welfare at heart? I said I was deeply conscious of the honour, and would convey his offer to you."

"And having done that," said Sheba brusquely, "you can tell him when he calls again that I am *not* so conscious of its being an honour, and have certainly neither inclination nor intention of accepting it."

Mrs. Levison kept silence for a moment. She was bitterly enraged, but for once she felt it would be a losing game if she gave way to violence. Sheba was obstinate and self-willed, but she could be easily guided by kindness. She sank back in her chair

and gave a little sob. The girl sprang forward instantly and threw herself on her knees beside her. "Mother," she cried, "what is it—what is the matter? Don't cry; oh, please don't cry."

But Mrs. Levison's sobs redoubled. "Oh, Sheba, Sheba," she wailed, "how you always distress me; you are my only daughter and I'm sure I love you, and wish to make you happy, but it always seems as if you delighted in doing the very reverse of what I wish. Such a chance—such a splendid offer! Why, you would mix with crowned heads, go into the world, become a celebrated and beautiful woman—and just for a whim, a child's fancy, you want to throw it all away. You will break my heart, you really will."

"Dear mother," said the girl earnestly, "if you love me as you say, you would not want me to be miserable, and I should be that if I married Count Pharamond. I don't like him; I never did; he is bold, coarse, and I am sure, cruel. Besides, I don't want to marry, and as it is myself I am to give away, surely I ought to have some voice in the matter."

"Such an offer—such a position," still lamented Mrs. Levison between her sobs.

"But if I don't care for them how do they concern *you*?" asked the straightforward Sheba. "I should be in another country—probably you would never see my splendour, or my position. It could not be any great satisfaction, I should think, only to *speak* of them. That is what it amounts to, and for my own part I would not accept Count Pharamond as a husband, even if he had a throne to offer me instead of a title. I don't care for him——"

"Do not talk so foolishly," exclaimed her mother, dropping her handkerchief at last, and her sobs with it. "It is enough to exasperate a saint to hear you. Such a chance will never occur again. I am sure of that, and as years go on you will always regret not taking my advice now. Bessie Saxton would not need to be asked twice."

"No," said Sheba quietly; "once would be enough, but then—I am not quite like Bessie Saxton."

"I wish to Heaven you were!" cried Mrs. Levison with pardonable energy. "She is admirable in every sense of the word. I am so fond of her that I have asked her to stay on here when the others leave Sydney. You are no companion to me—none whatever—and my drives are so lonely, and as for dresses, why, you never even *seem* to see whether I have a new gown on or not."

"I thought," said the girl gravely, "that Dolly more than made up for *my* blindness."

"Dolly!" cried Mrs. Levison, "a spoilt pert minx." Then with another burst of emotion she went on, "It is hard to have only one daughter and to see her turning out as you are doing. What do you expect will become of you? You have no fortune—you are no beauty—and if you live the drudging life of a governess

you will soon lose your one marketable possession—youth. A nice future then awaits you."

"Perhaps," said Sheba, "I have another marketable possession, as you delicately put it—*brains*; they may enable me to live, even without beauty or fortune."

"Oh, no doubt," sneered Mrs. Levison; "you think yourself very clever, but there is such a thing as being too self-satisfied. I tell you again that if you refuse this offer you will repent it as long as you live. Mr. Levison will be furious, and I—I really think disappointment and sorrow will make an old woman of me."

"I am very sorry," said Sheba rising to her feet. "Perhaps the count would wait for—Dolly. It is only a question of nine or ten years, and he admires youth."

"Don't be an idiot," cried Mrs. Levison, losing her temper at last, as she invariably did in all their arguments, however much she might have determined to keep it. "Now listen to me. I will give you a week to reflect; by that time I hope you will have seen the folly of throwing away such a chance. The count perfectly adores you, and I am sure you have given him every encouragement. It would be perfectly shameful now to throw him over. The act of a heartless coquette."

"Coquette!" cried Sheba, her face growing scarlet. "That is not true, mother. I have never encouraged him. You asked him to the house; you made him take me into dinner; you threw us together as much as you possibly could, but I—I did nothing; I rather avoided him, as you know. I am not to blame if he credits me with your good intentions."

"Very well, Sheba," said her mother, drawing herself up and growing very white. "You have said enough. Things have come to a crisis between us, and I mean to decide once for all. I will *not* let you openly defy me under my own roof. I have been too indulgent hitherto, and *this* is the result—direct disobedience. Well, it shall be put a stop to now—at once. You do not go out of this house without my permission. You do not give another lesson to this German's child, or leave my roof under any pretence whatever. As long as you are under age you are under your parents' authority, and I mean to enforce that authority—you hear me?"

"Yes," said Sheba very quietly, "I hear you."

"Then remember I am in earnest," said Mrs. Levison; "I will have no more of your obstinacy and self-will. I have been a great fool to put up with them so long. But I shall not do so for another day—another hour. Now go to your room and reflect on what I have said."

Sheba moved coldly and silently away. At the door she paused, and holding the handle in her hand, she looked back to where that passionate angry figure stood in the centre of the large room.

"Will you tell me one thing," she said in a low restrained

voice—a voice so unlike her own that her mother scarcely recognized it; "when—am I of age?"

"When you are twenty-one," said Mrs. Levison; "nearly three years hence."

"Three years," echoed the girl. "Well, mother, hear me now in my turn. For those three years I will do your bidding in all things save—marriage. But the very day the last year expires, I will leave your roof and go out into the world and earn my own living—though I have to work like a galley-slave to do it!"

"Oh no, you won't," said Mrs. Levison, with a cold slighting laugh. "I know what all that bombastic talk is worth. Long before the three years are up, my dear, you will be glad to marry any one—even Count Pharamond."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### BESSIE SAXTON HAS SUSPICIONS.

"OH, you silly! silly! silly," cried Dolly, dancing to and fro before Sheba as she sat in her own room that evening. "Oh, you great big goose of geese! Only to think of it—such a chance, such a splendid, glorious, magnificent chance! Oh! if I were only seventeen. If I were sixteen even, I would marry that count myself."

"Would to Heaven you could," said Sheba lifting her pale face and heavy eyes to the little restless figure before her. "You have about as much heart as he has."

"Heart!" scoffed Dolly. "Phoo! What does that matter—in marrying? Papa says money is everything. Here you would have money and position—both. Why, he has great castles—*châteaux* he calls them, in France—and horses and carriages and goes to court: he has told me all that and so has mamma, and to think you won't marry him. Oh, you silly donkey of a Sheba!"

"I suppose I *am* an idiot according to your interpretation and mother's," said Sheba coldly. "You will make up for my deficiencies, however. There will be no difficulty in marrying *you* to any satyr or *roué* in the shape of a man, provided only he has the wherewithal to satisfy your extravagance."

"I don't know what you mean by satyr—or the French word," said Dolly. "Was it French—it sounded like it? But I am sure Count Pharamond is a very nice man—much nicer than most of the men who come here."

"Oh," laughed Sheba scornfully, "if it comes to contrasts——"

"Well," said Dolly, "as you look down on the Jewish men, why don't you marry a Christian? Is he a Christian—or a Roman Catholic though?"

Sheba laughed outright.

"It is time some one looked after your education," she said ; then the word "education" brought back the memory of her mother's mandate respecting her own little pupil, and her brow clouded again and she wondered what she could possibly say to Paul Meredith for breaking her engagement in this abrupt fashion.

"I couldn't believe it when mamma told me," went on the little chatterer. "That he should want to marry you was wonderful enough—but that you should say no—*no* ! You surely don't mean it, Sheba ?"

"Yes," said the girl frowning, "I do, and I don't wish to discuss the subject with you or any one. Now go away from my room. I have to write a letter."

"It is more than stupid, it is shameful," persisted Dolly, moving reluctantly away. "I could have been your bridesmaid—one of them—of course you would have had six at least, and we could have worn white lace over blue satin. Blue and white are my colours, you know, and then the cake, and the favours, and all the fun of a real wedding, and how jealous the Moss's would have been—and to think it's all spoilt just because you've said 'No.' It is downright cruel of you !"

"No doubt," said Sheba with exasperation. "Marriage of course entails nothing but just the ceremony, and fuss and finery of the day ; nothing more—no after life together !"

"Well—children—generally," said Dolly with a cunning little smile. "But you needn't think about them—just at first."

"Dolly," cried Sheba growing scarlet. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Whatever will your precocity end in ?"

"Oh, a husband and an establishment of course," said the child grinning maliciously. "I've heard about nothing else since I was three years old. I shall be quite an heiress, you know. I shall be able to pick and choose—you can't afford to do that—your own mother says so. That's why every one will think you such a fool—even your friend Bessie Saxton. Take care she doesn't catch him. She would give her ears to do it, I know."

"Are you going ?" asked Sheba wearily, as she sat down again on her chair and leaned her head on her hand.

"You are always in a hurry to get rid of me," said the child. "And I'm sure I'm the only one in the house that cares for you at all. Oh Sheba, *do, do* think over the count's offer. You will no longer be snubbed and badly treated ; you will be as grand a lady as the Governor General's wife—you could have diamonds as big as peas—much bigger than Mrs. Moss's. I know hers are only second-hand ; her husband got them from a client who had borrowed money at 50 per cent., I heard that from Sara Moss herself. Oh ! if I were only in your shoes, I'd dance for joy at the idea of such a chance. Mamma and papa can talk of nothing else. Do you know Bessie Saxton is coming to-morrow—to stay ? Whatever will she say when she hears this ?"



Sheba groaned in despair. It seemed as if nothing but main force would get rid of the irrepressible Dolly to-night.

"You don't seem at all happy as you are," she persisted, "so why don't you try another sort of life? You are not bad-looking now—but it won't last, and then you'll find yourself an old maid."

Sheba rose and seized the child by the arm. "Dolly," she said sternly, "you have said enough; now go. You don't understand my reasons, and I am not going to explain them. Leave the room at once."

Sulky and abashed the child obeyed, and Sheba at last left to herself sat down to pen a few lines to Meredith in explanation of her broken engagement. The hot tears filled her eyes as she wrote. Her life would seem so hard and dreary now without occupation and without congenial companionship. And Müller, the kind-hearted old German, what would he think of her changed resolves? Still her mother had spoken so firmly and definitely that the girl did not dream of disobeying her. Never did she remember being spoken to in such a manner since her early childhood, and she saw clearly enough that Mrs. Levison meant what she said.

A great chill and fear seemed to touch her heart as she thought of what such tyranny would mean now. Isolation—silence—pain. The absence of a face she had grown to watch and long for, as the day's one delight. The chance meeting of eyes eloquent in their very silence. But she wrote her letter all the same and it was all the colder and more formal because of the pain that shadowed every word; she wrote it and rang for a servant to post it, and then when it had actually gone, sat on there in her quiet little chamber, wondering what fresh ills Fate had in store for her.

Meanwhile the story of her folly and obstinacy was being related to her stepfather. It did not tend to increase his lukewarm affection for the girl, but it made him very furious with what he called her d——d high-flown airs. He even went so far as to declare that if she persisted in refusing Pharamond's offer he would turn her out of his house, but his wife reminded him that in all probability that would just suit the refractory girl. "She is always talking about independence," added her mother. "The best way to break her spirit is to keep her here in complete subjection, and not allow her to do anything she wishes."

"By Jove!" said Mr. Levison suddenly, "I believe you're right. No doubt those new friends would encourage her in obstinacy. Very well—give her a taste of solitary confinement; perhaps that will take the nonsense out of her. Ah!" and he turned proudly to Dolly, who was stuffing herself with raisins and *bonbons* from his plate, "what a pity you didn't bring her up as I have brought *my* daughter. No fear of her turning up her nose at a good offer for some romantic nonsense about love—eh, Dolly, my pet?"

"I should think not, papa," said Dolly. "I suppose," she added reflectively, "the count wouldn't wait for *me*? You might ask him."

Mr. Levison burst into such explosive mirth over the cleverness of this remark, that his wife had left the table before he recovered either gravity or breath.

She betook herself to her own room, and thought and thought till her head ached of what she could do to make Sheba retract her refusal to marry Count Pharamond.

"She must and shall accept," she repeated with angry resolution. "I couldn't have the face to say 'No' to a titled personage—and she will be perfectly unbearable living on here for the next three years. Oh! why hadn't I a daughter like Bessie Saxton?"

\* \* \* \* \*

The next day Bessie Saxton herself arrived for that visit upon which she had determined, and for which she had almost asked. When she heard the news she was almost as furious as Mrs. Levison, but for a very different reason.

She felt she had been duped and tricked by this man, and as she remembered some of his words and hints, the blood rushed in a hot tide of wrath and humiliation to her face.

Being as unreasonable as a jealous woman proverbially is, she blamed Sheba in an equal degree, and though she pretended to ally herself with Mrs. Levison, she secretly determined that the girl should never have the opportunity of changing her mind.

"There *must* be some one else," she thought. "I am sure of it, otherwise she would have jumped at such a chance. I shall find out before long, and then——"

Without finishing the reflection she went to Sheba.

The girl was sitting at a small table covered with books and papers. She sprang to her feet with a cry of delight when she saw Bessie enter.

"You have come, then?" she said. "Oh, I am so glad. I suppose you know I am in disgrace as usual?"

"You are very unlucky," said Bessie, kissing her somewhat coldly. "What is this new folly I hear of?"

"They all want me to marry that odious Count Pharamond," said Sheba passionately, "and I won't—nothing will induce me to accept him."

"Let us talk it over," said Bessie composedly. "I don't see why you should call him odious. He is the only gentleman—barring Noel Hill—that I have ever met at your house; and certainly he is a very good match."

"Oh!" cried Sheba impatiently, "when shall I hear the last of his being a good match? As if I cared for *that*!"

"Do you care for any one else?" asked Bessie, looking at her searchingly.

Sheba flushed scarlet, then grew as suddenly pale.

"Care?" she said. "I—no—of course not. I have never even thought of such a thing."

"Oh," said her friend coolly, "love doesn't always wait to be—thought of—before paying us a visit. Perhaps Noel Hill has found favour in your eyes."

Sheba laughed outright. "Noel Hill? He is just like a brother. I have never thought of him in any other way."

"Well," said Bessie, "the question is, what's to be done? Your mother and Mr. Levison are simply furious. They mean to make you accept this man if it is possible."

"It will never be possible," said Sheba calmly, "*never*. They may kill me if they like. I really often think I wouldn't mind if they did. I have always been unhappy—always—and no one cares for me here. They would be very glad if I was dead——"

"Oh, don't talk of anything so horrible," said Bessie with a little shiver. "Death indeed! Why, you hardly know what life is yet. But what are you going to do? Of course they can't force you to marry this man, but they can make life very unpleasant for you if you don't."

"I know that," said Sheba mournfully. "Mother has forbidden me to teach little Paul Meredith any longer, and I have had to write and explain that to his father. It is very cruel. It was the only pleasure I had."

"An odd sort of pleasure, I should fancy," said Bessie. "But then you always were such an extraordinary girl."

Then a sudden thought crossed her mind. "Perhaps it was the father who was the attraction. He is handsome enough certainly, and just the type of man to attract a romantic girl like Sheba. She is such a fool—she couldn't keep a secret from me. . . . I must find out."

But for the present she only plied her with skilful hints and pretended sympathy, and Sheba even confided to her the resolve she had made to write, and in discussing that engrossing subject she had almost forgotten her new trouble, when a sharp knock came at the door, and a servant entered with a card:

"Mr. Paul Meredith, if you please, to see Miss Ormatroyd."

Sheba started to her feet, her face growing as white as her dress. "Oh, Bessie," she gasped, "what am I to do? What can I say?"

Bessie looked at her white face and great startled eyes. "I do believe——" she said to herself. Then she laughed aloud. "Don't be so terrified," she said; "go and tell him the facts as they stand. Your mother wants you to marry this French count, and because you won't, she refuses to let you do anything you yourself wish."

"Shall I tell him—that?" faltered Sheba, growing red and pale with emotion. "Won't he think it very odd?"

"Not in the least, I imagine," said her friend dryly. "And you know you have a predilection for speaking the truth."

Sheba moved towards the door in a shy, absorbed fashion, and Bessie's cold blue eyes studied her intently.

"I am sure I am right," she said to herself. "She will tell him exactly how matters are, and then—well, then I suppose there will be a crisis!"

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### A CRISIS.

WITH trembling fingers Sheba turned the handle of the drawing-room door and found herself in the presence of Paul Meredith. He came towards her quickly and held out his hand.

"Miss Ormatroyd," he said, "what is the meaning of all this? Your note was such a surprise to me; I felt I must have an explanation. They told me your mother was out so I asked for you. I—I really could not understand what you meant by saying you could not come any more to my house. It is as if—as if—you had not been treated with proper respect, or consideration there."

"Oh, no, no," cried Sheba impetuously. "Pray do not think that. I must have expressed myself very badly, but I was so distressed—so unhappy——"

He saw she was trembling violently, and still holding her hand he led her to a chair. "Look upon me as a friend," he said, "and tell me all that has happened. Am I to blame?"

"No," cried Sheba, flushing hotly, "it is not you—it is—myself. They never wished me to teach—still my mother did not absolutely forbid it—but now——"

"Yes?" he said inquiringly as she paused.

She lifted her great sorrowful eyes to his, and that look went to his heart, it was so pathetic and so patient.

"I don't know if I ought to tell you," she stammered, her colour changing with every word. "They wish me to—marry."

"Marry!" he started as he echoed the word, and looked at her again with soft and troubled eyes.

"Marry," Sheba continued. "Some one I don't like—and because I refused they have forbidden me to do anything that will take me away from home; that is all. I did not like to tell you when I wrote."

"I should think not," he said, his face growing dark with anger. "What an infamous thing, and who is the individual whose suit is so favoured?"

"A French count who visits here. The Count de Pharamond," said Sheba colouring shyly.

"Good heavens!" he cried passionately. "That blackguard!"

Sheba looked up in surprise. "Is he a bad man?" she asked simply. "I felt it—but I could not say why."

"Yes," answered Meredith curtly. "He is bad—thoroughly bad—but report says he is enormously rich. I suppose that gilds even his sins in the eyes of your parents. Have you known him long?"

"No," cried Sheba; "only a few weeks——"

"And have you refused—decidedly refused to marry him?" asked Meredith.

"Yes," she said quickly. "But he spoke to my mother, not to me, and I don't think she has told him that I said no."

"But," he said, "it seems very preposterous that for this reason you are not to fulfil your engagement. I left Paul crying his eyes out. Nothing would satisfy him but that I should come here and speak to you myself. It is very unfortunate," he added, "for I am leaving Sydney soon and I felt so happy in thinking you would be with him and prevent his missing me. Perhaps if I were to speak to your mother——"

"I am afraid," Sheba said sorrowfully, "it would be no use. I did not know that I had no right to make any engagement without their sanction. They seemed glad enough to get rid of me just at that time."

He walked up and down the long room—his brows knit—his face dark with anger. "You are not happy—here?" he said abruptly.

"No," she said, the tears gathering in her eyes. "Most unhappy."

"I thought so—I felt it," he went on, speaking stormily and yet with deep feeling. "I never said much to you, but I could read your face and I knew your life young as it is had known troubles; so has mine, as I told you when we met again. Perhaps I should not speak, perhaps I am saying too much, but if it lay in my power—if I could make you happy——"

"You," she cried—and startled and confused and vaguely glad she sprang to her feet, and gazed at his troubled face and kindling eyes.

"I" — he said very low, "I never thought to say it again to living woman. I set myself against you—I avoided you as you know—but—well, fate is too strong for me I suppose—I love you, Sheba. Will you trust me? Will you share my wandering life and end all this unhappiness and tyranny? I think I could make you happy . . . if you would let me."

Sheba had listened like one in a dream. It seemed as if she was in a dream—standing there in the big shadowy room with its closed shutters and faintly perfumed air—standing there and hearing such words from this her hero—the one man, who all unknown to herself, had peopled her fancies and lived in her memory since the first hour his eyes had met her own.

Her heart throbbed so fiercely it nearly suffocated her. The light and the shadows seemed to swim hazily before her sight.

"You cannot mean it," she cried faintly. "It is out of pity you speak. I—I should not have told you about this——"

She sank down in her chair and hid her face in her hands. A stifled sob escaped her. It seemed as if the last drop had filled her cup of shame and perplexity.

He came near, and stooping touched her hands with his lips. "Do not weep," he said; "I would not pain you for all the world. Is it so hard to believe I love you? If a man like Count Pharamond has been subjugated, that might teach you your power."

Her hands were drawn into his—her eyes, still humid with tears, looked back at his own. She seemed to realize at last that he spoke truly, and her whole nature yielded to the passionate and enthralling force of awakened feeling.

"Oh," she cried brokenly, "I am not worthy of your love; you are so great, so famous—and I——"

"Indeed, I am but a graceless singer," he said and drew her gently to his heart, and touched almost with reverence the trembling mobile lips, "but you will be to me inspiration—glory—life."

"I—oh no," she murmured, trembling greatly at the strangeness of that first embrace, which made her heart throb like a bird in the hand of its captor.

"If—you love me," he said, "and I think you do——"

"Yes," she said simply. "I did not know—I hardly dared to think—but I know now."

"That is well," he said, drawing a long deep breath. "And after confessing it you need not worry yourself any more; I will fight your battles for you——"

He raised her head, and looked long and earnestly into those great, deep, wonderful eyes. What wells of truth and tenderness and purity they were.

As they thus stood oblivious to all else, tranced in that half embrace, the door opened and Mrs. Levison swept in.

\* \* \* \* \*

As a matter of history, it has not yet been recorded that the sight of one's daughter enacting on her own responsibility the rôle of the female character in that celebrated picture of "The Huguenot," has ever been greeted with special cordiality.

Mrs. Levison was not destined to prove an exception to the rule; perhaps, however, she found—as other mothers before and after her time have found—that the other character in the affecting tableau was just the very last person she would have desired to see in it.

Bristling and irate, she darted a vengeful glance at Meredith and then at Sheba, and said icily:

"Pray may I ask who is this—gentleman?"

Feeling he was in a false position, Paul stammered feebly that he had called to inquire Miss Ormatroyd's reason for breaking her engagement. "For the rest," he added, gaining courage at sight of Sheba's terror, "I am quite ready to give you an explanation of . . . of what must seem a little—extraordinary——"

"Extraordinary!" cried Mrs. Levison, her face growing red and furious at the coolness and audacity of this stranger; "I should think it was—extraordinary."

"Perhaps," he said, "when I tell you that I love your daughter, and that she does me the honour to return that love, you will allow that——"

"Allow! Love! What preposterous nonsense! I—I don't understand how you dare speak of such things—you, a total stranger."

"Pardon me. I am not a stranger to your daughter, and I am endeavouring to explain——"

"I don't want any explanations," interrupted Mrs. Levison passionately, "and I have nothing to say to you on such a subject except that I have other views for my daughter. Even if I had not, I should not listen to a person who takes advantage of a girl's unprotected position to make clandestine love to her unknown to her rightful guardians."

"Mother!" cried Sheba, her eyes flashing indignantly, "do not accuse Mr. Meredith of dishonourable conduct. He never spoke one word to me that all the world might not have heard, and I never even guessed that he did me the honour of caring for me, till a few moments ago."

"Honour!" sneered Mrs. Levison furiously. "A fine honour! But I am not here to discuss the matter. Leave the room instantly, Sheba—instantly," stamping her foot as the girl gave no sign of attention. "As for this presumptuous individual, I will send Mr. Levison to him with an answer. I have given my opinion; and, now, sir, I must ask you to leave the house."

She waved her arm towards the door, but Meredith only advanced to Sheba and took both her hands in his.

"One moment, madam," he said proudly. "You have insulted me most grossly, but for that I care little. I must tell you, however, that I consider my love for your daughter and hers for me gives me a right to protect her from the unkindness and tyranny she experiences at home. Whenever she chooses to leave that home and seek my protection, I shall be ready to receive her. I will make her my wife to-morrow if she will only say the word."

"She will not dare to say the word, as you call it," cried Mrs. Levison, trembling now with passion and baffled ambition. "Bad and bold as her conduct is, I yet trust she has not *quite* forgotten the duty and obedience she owes *me*. As long as she is under age she shall remain under my roof, and she cannot marry without my consent."



Paul Meredith smiled. "I think," he said, "you are speaking somewhat foolishly. "She is over sixteen, and quite of an age to marry with, or without your consent. I am sorry to have to speak so plainly, but you have brought it on yourself, and I fail to see why you should insult me without waiting to hear who or what I am. If I gave up my profession to-morrow and went back to England, I should be entitled to a position equal to that of this not very reputable French count whose suit you favour."

"If you were a prince of the blood it would make no difference to my determination," said Mrs. Levison loftily. "I consider you have behaved as no gentleman would ever have done, and, as I said before, I have other views for my daughter."

He bowed coldly, and looked once more at the trembling white-faced girl by his side.

"Courage, my dearest," he said softly. "Remember I shall be true to you, come what may; and now, as it seems useless to prolong this unpleasant interview, I will say good-evening."

He took up his hat, gave one long pressure to Sheba's hand, bowed ceremoniously to her mother, and left the room.

As the door closed Mrs. Levison turned on Sheba like a tigress. She was in far too great a passion to weigh her speech, or care what terms of wrath and opprobrium she showered on the girl.

Her coarse, cruel words tore off every illusion that had sheltered and made beautiful this idyl of her love. She heard her conduct described as immodest, indelicate, hypocritical, false, vile, treacherous, every epithet indeed that passion and injustice could frame into utterance.

Many as had been the painful scenes between her mother and herself, there had never been a scene like this. For Sheba was determined to be true to her own heart, and her mother was equally determined she should not. Like most tyrannical people, Mrs. Levison could not stand opposition. It made her cruel, vindictive and irrational. She stormed and raved, and grew more and more wrathful every moment, while Sheba only stood there mute and still, but with that resolute look on her white face that her mother knew of old, and which made her inwardly ashamed of her undignified anger, and vaguely conscious that it was as the sea's futile waves dashing against the immovability of a rock.

"Now listen—once for all," she said when she had fairly exhausted her vocabulary of abuse. "I have made up my mind that you *shall* marry Pharamond, and no one else, so the sooner you give up this romantic nonsense the better. Go to your room, and don't leave it until you are prepared to obey my wishes. If you come to your senses I will perhaps endeavour to forgive your undutiful conduct. For the present I would rather not see your face at all. I am ashamed even to think a daughter of mine, brought up as you have been brought up, should be guilty of such a low,

miserable intrigue as this that I have discovered. I shall have poor little Dolly contaminated next."

The bathos of that conclusion made Sheba laugh, despite her distress and perplexity.

"You had better keep her from me, then," she said as she prepared to leave the room. "And if your forgiveness depends on my marrying Pharamond, I am afraid it will be a long time before it is required."

"I say you *shall* marry him," said Mrs. Levison fiercely, stamping her foot as she spoke.

"And I," said Sheba resolutely and quietly, "say I shall *not*. Nothing will induce me to do so—nothing!"

Mrs. Levison's face grew ashy and haggard. She was far more bent on this match now than she had been before, partly because she hated to find herself worsted in any combat, and partly because she really considered that a marriage with an opera singer, "a puppet of the stage," as she termed Meredith, would be an everlasting disgrace. She was terribly obstinate and prejudiced in some things, and no amount of argument could convince her that a *gentleman* would ever make music, or acting his profession, when there were honourable, lucrative posts, such as clerkships in merchants' offices and banks, to be had almost for the asking. Delighted as she would have been to see Sheba married, she yet had not the slightest intention of allowing her to marry any one like Meredith, and with the proposal of Count Pharamond still ringing in her ears, she could not even *think* calmly of her daughter's audacious suitor.

She threw herself, exhausted and weakly crying, on a couch as the door closed on Sheba. How she pitied herself for the misfortune of possessing such a daughter. Why could she not be as other girls, even as Bessie Saxton?

Just then the door opened again, and Bessie put her head in.

"Gracious!" she cried. "What *has* happened? Sheba passed me just now like a tornado, and has locked herself into her room, and now you—my dear Mrs. Levison, pray tell me what *is* the matter?"

And between her sobs and bursts of rage Mrs. Levison told her. Bessie listened quite silently, but her eyes sparkled with malice and her heart beat high with triumph.

When Mrs. Levison ceased and withdrew her handkerchief, she gazed appealingly at the girl's impassive face. "Oh, my dear," she moaned, "can't you help me? Is there nothing you could advise?"

For a moment Bessie was silent. Then she said in a low, hard voice, "If you are resolved on this marriage, there is but one thing to do—desperate cases, desperate remedies, you know. I—I hardly like to suggest anything. I know how obstinate Sheba is. Arguments and persuasions are simply wasted on her."

"You are right," groaned Mrs. Levison. "Ah, if Providence had only blessed me with a daughter like you! But what is the suggestion, my dear? I would do anything—*anything* to prevent her marrying this singer."

"Well," said Bessie a little nervously and lowering her voice, "it is simply this; you must get Pharamond to—compromise—her in some way. Then she will be *obliged* to marry him."

Mrs. Levison stared at her. "What do you mean?" she asked, somewhat startled at the boldness of the suggestion.

"It is the only thing to do," said the girl hurriedly, "and it is easily managed. It is often done in France, and a hint would be enough for Pharamond. I could manage it, if you wish. Of course only for *your* sake. I can't bear to see you so unhappy."

"And how is it to be done?" asked Mrs. Levison curiously.

"Simply enough. Give one of your large dinner-parties, and arrange that the count shall stay the night here. That is all."

"But," stammered Mrs. Levison, "my husband will think it odd. We have never asked him to stay before . . . and—he might refuse."

The girl rose and shrugged her handsome shoulders with a gesture of indifference.

"He will not refuse," she said, and a faint colour stained her clear pale skin. "And I thought you asked my advice."

"Yes," said Mrs. Levison almost humbly, "I did—but—"

"If you can suggest anything else, do so," said Bessie coldly. "I know Sheba better than you do. She will never marry this man unless—circumstances force her to do so."

"And you think," said Mrs. Levison, "that you can arrange the—circumstances? I should not like any scandal, you know."

"There will be none," said Bessie with an odd hard smile. "I have read my little plot in a French novel. It is as simple as it is effectual. You can trust me, Mrs. Levison."

"Ah!" sighed that lady with her ever recurring regret, "so clever—so pretty. If *only* you had been my daughter instead of Sheba!"

(To be continued.)

## LONDON LETTERS,

TO VARIOUS COUNTRY COUSINS.

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### No. I.

DEAR COUSINS,

You cannot imagine how the early burst of summer weather has changed the look of things in town. Not only are the trees and shrubs glorified with the freshest of green, but the parks and Piccadilly are all aglow with summer raiment. Heretical as it is to adopt a sunshade before one has carried an *en-tout-cas* for several weeks, some of us have done so in self-defence. Of course, it is as unnatural to do this as it would be to run before one has practised walking for awhile; but then, you see, the weather has been, and still is, delightfully unnatural, and all heterodoxies are forgiven by reason of Nature's pleasant change of plan. This time last year we were cold and dull, suffering from a want of sunshine. These bright days are antidotes to many an ill, but they are a little apt to make one feel tired and languid, coming so suddenly upon the cold.

We all went and sat in the Park yesterday, and were much amused by the kaleidoscopic procession that passed before our eyes. Have the tiny bonnets reached your Miss Chiffon yet? I suppose not. Country milliners are not good at taking in new ideas. To tell them of a fresh fashion is like sowing parsley seed, which is said to go all round the world before it comes up again and reappears above the soil.

As to the absent dress-improver, even the town dressmakers of the second and third class *will* still put it in the gowns they make. I begin to believe that they have forgotten how dresses "went" in the ante-cushion era. Their eyes have become so habituated to the amazing promontory at the back that the human form seems denuded without it. We all three got our new gowns home on Saturday, and though we had enjoined upon Mrs. Whalebone not to put one scrap of cushion or one vestige of steel into the skirts, there were the horrid things almost as large as ever. I was cross, Mary plaintive, and Lucy sad. Seizing the scissors, I immediately cut out the cushion, flung it on the top of the bookcase in my wrath (we must have the step-ladder up to-morrow to fish it down again!) and then I took out the steel. Mary and Lucy follow their usual plan of letting me experiment upon my vile body (in case you do

not know the Latin quotation I may explain that it is not really vile; quite the contrary), and following my example only when it has resulted in a success. They came upstairs with me to see me try the dress on—such a lamentable sight as it was! Having been constructed for subterranean addenda, it would not come right without them, and I was in despair. At last a happy thought struck me. I took about half a yard of stiff muslin and pleated it into the waistband at the back, flattening the pleats as much as possible and allowing them to be about a quarter of a yard in depth. This answers excellently well, and the others have adopted my plan.

I must tell you something amusing that happened to Mary yesterday. She went to the corset maker to have a corset tried on, and objecting to be laced to within an inch of her life, she said: "I cannot bear it so tight as that." The reply was: "If I had known it, miss, I should have declined to make for you. Ladies who do not lace tight do me no credit." Was it not funny? You should have seen Mary's face, divided as it was between laughter and annoyance.

The shops are simply enchanting just now, and every day I walk down Regent Street I spend a large fortune in imagination. The hats are florally seductive, and the cool gowns in foulard and zephyr are simply syren-like. Let me see, however. Did the syrens sing the money out of the men's pockets or wool into their ears? I forget a little about them, but if I have mixed things, you will be sure to forgive me from that fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind. We have just got a supply of the new tennis shirts from Barker's, and we look very smart in them. You should invest in a few, for they are one of the latest developments of fashion, and look very pretty under our last year's blazers, which are as good as new. There is no form of economy more laudably economical than that which buys the best of materials and workmanship at the best shops. Is there? We see such quantities of cheap but pretty rubbish in some of the windows here in Kensington, that we used occasionally to be tempted to invest. But a few trials have convinced us that the more a thing costs, at a really good shop, the more value will one get out of it.

The Park is delicious on these bright May mornings, and one sees every possible variety of costume, from wintry furs and velvets to summer jerseys and light-tinted skirts. The Duke of Portland and Miss Dallas-Yorke were a central point of interest yesterday. She was looking very handsome in a Redfern gown of dark grey tweed, a short coat to match, and one of Madame Lili's delicious bonnets, and he wore as blithe an air as a prospective bridegroom should. The wedding is to be in Ascot week, I believe, but it is not yet settled at which church it is to be. St. George's, Hanover Square, is no longer the all fashionable marriage-place it was in the days when its very name was redolent of orange blossoms and bridal garments. St. Peter's, Eaton Square, and St. Paul's,

Knightsbridge, have to a great extent taken its place, and the third ducal wedding of the season may possibly be celebrated at one of these. The bridesmaids are to wear white satin and the loveliest and floweriest of hats.

The Princess of Wales is looking perfectly charming just now, and there was never surely any one who embellished half mourning as she does. The dress she wore in the Park yesterday is worth describing, so well thought out was every detail. It was black velvet, made with a coat bodice of the same, opening over a vest of white moiré silk which was fastened up the centre with very small gilt buttons; on either side of the vest were soft folds of black silk, intervening between it and the velvet jacket, which had buttons of gold and silver, the former metal being raised in relief upon a ground of the former. Her bonnet was of the very smallest kind, with openwork jet brim and crown of tulle, with a bow of narrow black satin ribbon and no other ornaments, save a diamond-hilted sword which supported it at the back.

Three drawing-rooms in May make it a full month for London, and the blocks in Bond Street and Piccadilly are almost constant. Mary is one of those stolid beings who can cross a street just under the noses of two or three horses, while Lucy is addicted to the dangerous habit of rushing half-way across, stopping in the middle and then flying back again, just when the oncoming cabmen had begun to act on the supposition that she was continuing her first intention. I always say that I know exactly how a mother hen feels when her ducklings take to the water, for I endure a variety of emotions watching these two sisters of mine crossing a crowded thoroughfare. My dear country cousins, be advised by an experienced town-dweller and give yourselves in charge to a policeman when you want to cross Piccadilly or Bond Street on a full day. I have never seen a more humiliating spectacle than was offered by two girls the other day. They had got a few paces from the pavement and, being shut out from it by a line of cabs, found themselves prevented from crossing further by a number of vehicles; so there they stood, scarlet with terror, hopping about and uttering the most undignified shrieks, while the cabmen were all convulsed with laughter at their predicament, and with the chivalry of their class endeavoured still further to appal them by stentorian shouts. One's endeavour through life should aim at being "mistress of the situation," and crowded crossings are good practice in the art. A hint to the wise is enough.

I was among the thousands who waited in the Park to-day to see the Queen, and was at last rewarded by a glimpse of Her Most Gracious Majesty, and seeing her bow in her own inimitable way to the greetings of her people.

I expect to have a quantity of news to tell you next month.

C. E. H.

*Per*

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